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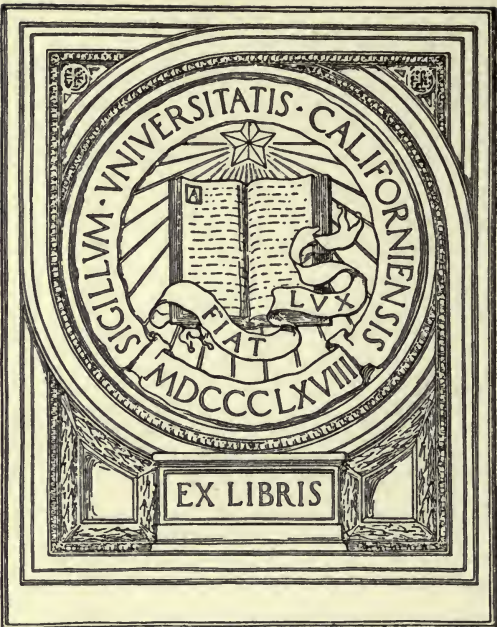
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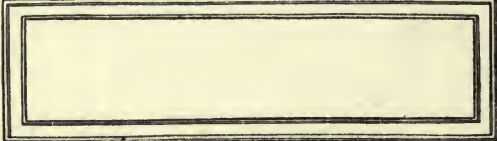
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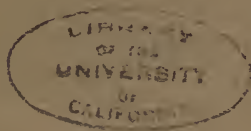
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AUTO-SUGGESTION IN PRIVATE PRAYER

A Study
in the Psychology
of Prayer



By
KARL RUF STOLZ, B. D., Ph. D.

AUTO-SUGGESTION IN PRIVATE PRAYER

A Study
in the Psychology
of Prayer



UNIVERSITY OF
CALIFORNIA

KARL R. STOLZ, Ph. D.
Professor in Wesley College

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PREFACE

The writer has found the two following conceptions of prayer current and typical: that it is purely subjective in its effects; that it is a miracle-working process in the sense that its answer is irreducible to natural law. It is hoped that this little book will help to modify these conclusions.

Many have dismissed the whole subject of prayer because they have well-grounded suspicions that its operations are subjective. They have discredited the subjectivity of prayer because they have not appreciated the marvelous ongoings of the mind. It is the ambition of the writer to call attention to the value of religiously sanctioned mental processes. The following pages tend to exalt the subjective efficacy of prayer.

On the other hand, the interpretation of the answer to prayer in terms of miracles is deistic to the core. Deism assumes that the universe is self-running, at least for the present, and that the miraculous is the only evidence we have of the presence of God. The writer aims to point out that the natural laws which are made operative through prayer are forms of the self-activity of God, that the natural is supernatural in its origin, and that the supernatural has a natural and uniform mode of self-expression. The present volume is a plea for the doctrine of the Immanence of God.

In order to show that the fundamentals of religion are not disturbed by a psychological analysis of prayer, this treatise is brought to a close with a short chapter devoted to ultimate considerations. The scientific custom of merely describing processes as such has been departed from in a constructive attempt to relate the findings of this study to a religious conception of the finalities.

It would be presumptuous for the writer to pose as the pioneer in the field of the psychology of prayer. A cursory examination of the appended bibliography will convince the reader that others have broken the ground. The writer has tried to profit by the studies of others and at the same time to attack prayer from a fresh standpoint. It would be either a reflection

Preface

upon the attainments of others or a sure indication of the writer's lack of appreciation if the present study did not incorporate at least some of the findings of others.

It would be preposterous to say that all of the conclusions arrived at in this book are incontrovertible; nevertheless, the author hopes that some of his findings will stand the test of further investigation, that he has made some definite contribution to a better understanding of the meaning and value of prayer. The prayer habits of many religions and peoples must be diligently studied and compared before valid generalizations can be made, and the final word be spoken, as to the nature and function of prayer.

The writer is under obligations to many who have helped to give this study its present form and content, especially to Professor Edwin Diller Starbuck, at whose feet he had the privilege of sitting as a graduate student in the psychology of religion and philosophy.

KARL R. STOLZ.

Grand Forks, North Dakota,
April, 1913.

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Auto-Suggestion in Private Prayer

CHAPTER I

THE POINT OF VIEW

In man's quest for the highest values prayer occupies a unique place. While a select few seek truth by diligent research in the laboratory or scan the stellar universe for a glimpse of reality, while many stand enraptured before the masterpieces of art or listen spell-bound to the greatest of musical compositions, while some climb lofty mountain peaks or delve into the bowels of the earth or grope their way to the poles for a satisfying portion, while others try to find the highest good in the barter and trade of the market-place or in the attainment of a place in polite society,—in the midst of every conceivable manner in which men pursue what to them seems most worth while, multitudes temporarily withdraw from the presence of their fellow-men, fall upon the knees, clasp the hands, close the eyes, bow the head, and pour forth their deepest longings and highest aspirations, and arise, clothed with a unique sense of peace and power. That prayer is the source of power in the lives of many people whose intelligence and character compel the respect of others, no observer of discrimination can deny.

It is not at all strange that many abhor a critical examination of the marvelous phenomenon which we call prayer. Many instinctively shrink from submitting this sacred and personal experience to a rigorous analysis, lest unholy hands commit a

sacrilege and cast reflections upon the value of religion. The fear lest an investigator prove to be an iconoclast with unsympathetic approach to the task and consequent negative findings, is not always groundless. While many rest content in their experiential knowledge of prayer and feel no need of a critical investigation, there are others who are entitled to a just consideration. There are restive minds that crave a rational basis for the prayer life. They consider the scientific method a crucible in which the dross is separated from the gold. They assume that no fact is too sacred and personal to be tested. They hold that a critical study of the facts of prayer should be more than an academic exercise or the mere gratifying of the instinct of curiosity; they insist that intelligent analysis and description should disclose the real merits of prayer and lead to an increased control of its underlying principles. This attitude is manifestly sympathetic and leads to constructive work. And it is in this spirit that this inductive study of auto-suggestion in prayer is undertaken.

Although the subject may be approached from various angles, the writer has set for himself the task of ascertaining how and to what extent the facts of private prayer may be expressed in terms of auto-suggestion. It is obvious that it is necessary at the outset to know what is to be understood by auto-suggestion, for without a proper conception of it an intelligent study is impossible. An auto-suggestion may be defined as a self-imposed idea which tends to realize itself automatically. An auto-suggestion involves three phases: (1) the introduction of an idea into the mind by the self, (2) faith in the realization of the idea, (3) the self-realization of the idea. No auto-suggestion can be effective when any one of these three characteristics is wanting. Each makes its own particular contribution to the whole process, but is at the same time so inti-

The Spirit in Which Prayer Should Be Studied

Auto-Suggestion Defined

mately related to the others that it is impossible to determine where the activity of the one ends and that of the others begins. The unity of auto-suggestion should be borne in mind in the following brief description of its salient aspects.

The introduction of an idea into the mind by the self is the basal factor in auto-suggestion. It may be described in terms of attention to the suggested idea. The idea to be realized is a mental pressure; it is forced upon the stream of consciousness. Furthermore, an auto suggestion is a self-suggestion; the mental pressure is self-imposed; the field of consciousness is restricted to the

**Lodging the
Self-suggested
Idea in the Mind**

idea by one's own volition; the attention is given the idea on the person's own initiative. The self-suggested idea may have its source indirectly in a volitional pressure exerted by another self, or more directly in the consciousness of the individual in whom it is realized. That a social suggestion arises from without and an auto-suggestion from within the personality in which it is effective, is a distinction which must not be pressed too hard; for in an auto-suggestion the prompting may have been merely immediately internal, more remotely it may have been external. Often the difference is simply one in the degree of mental elaboration which the suggested idea undergoes before it is realized. When an idea suggested by another person is but slightly elaborated before it is realized, we may call it a social suggestion; but when that very same idea is considerably modified before it is expressed, we have a clear case of auto-suggestion. In a very vital sense a social suggestion becomes an auto-suggestion in many instances. An idea, forced upon consciousness by an external will, precipitates mental imagery—auditory or visual, tactile or motor, or what not—which starts a train of associations—one thing reminding of a similar or extremely dissimilar thing, one incident reminding of another occurring at the same time or place—which in turn may arouse the emotions to a considerable extent, all of which may so radically modify the suggested idea that it loses its original form and content. It

is obvious that it is not always easy to determine whether one is dealing with a social or an auto-suggestion. Many self-suggestions have their origin in such clearly conscious mental states as memory, reasoning and judgment. The subconscious with its rich content of biases and prejudices, sentiments and instincts, is a prolific source of self-suggestions. In short, to hold in mental focus an idea quite tinged with one's own mental states is the first essential of effective auto-suggestion.

The second phase of auto suggestion is faith that the idea will be realized. At first the suggested idea may meet with considerable opposition, but eventually it must be uncritically accepted by the person. The degree of opposition encountered by the self-suggested idea is in inverse proportion to the suggestibility of the person for that idea. Like

Faith in the Suggested Idea

a check presented at a bank, the idea must be indorsed by the self before it can be "cashed." In the case of auto-suggestion, however, the indorsee and the cashier of the idea are one and the same person. Faith tends to express itself in an expenditure of energy in the direction of expectation; there is an unintentional striving toward the realization of the accepted idea. Faith in terms of effort stimulates the subconscious activities which tend to realize the suggested idea. If the function of faith is to give direction to the subconscious processes, it follows that it is entirely irrelevant to what one attributes the result. It is common knowledge that in the practice of mental therapeutics the idea of health suggested to the patient tends to realize itself regardless of whether he believes in the efficacy of a bread-pill, a drug or his physician. The outcome is not determined by the nature of the object of faith, but by subconscious activities aroused by expectation. The expectancy of the reaction is of primary importance; the character of the reputed agency is a secondary matter.

The third aspect of auto-suggestion is the self-realization of the self-suggested idea through the automatic processes of the mental life. Once securely lodged in the mind and believed in, an idea tends to generate the power of self-expression. The automatic realization of the suggested idea is made possible by the tendency of whatever is in the mind to express itself. The self-expression of the self-suggested idea is a subconscious process. The writer subscribes to the view that our mental life is much more extensive than the present mental states of which we are aware, that mental processes of which we are not aware are continually taking place. A subconscious process is a mental activity of one's own self, of which one is not cognizant as one's own personal experience. The waking consciousness takes into account only the ripples on the surface of the great stream of the mental life. Most of life is submerged beneath the threshold of consciousness. Nevertheless, the relation between clearly conscious and subconscious activities is one of absolute unity and continuity. What goes on beneath the threshold of consciousness is in the very nature of the case beyond introspection and description, and it is, therefore, not safe to say much more than that a suggestion is just what the word implies that it is,—a hint, a proposal, a prompting, a cue, an intimation—about which subconscious activities of which we know next to nothing cluster. Hints gleaned from various sources indicate that attention and faith occasion the subconscious realization of the self-suggested idea. Professor Jastrow writes, "There exists in all intellectual endeavor a period of subconscious incubation, a process in great part subconscious, a slow, concealed maturing through the absorption of suitable pabulum."¹ And Professor Starbuck says, "After one exerts an effort, the fruition of it is accomplished by the life-forces which act through the personality. It is a well-known

The Self- Realization of Self-Suggestions

¹*The Subconscious*, p. 99.

law of the nervous system that it 'tends to form itself in accordance with the mode in which it is habitually exercised.' It is only a slight variation on this law to say that the nervous system grows in the direction of the expenditure of effort."¹ These supplementary quotations throw a few grateful rays of light upon the subconscious processes involved in the realization of the self-suggested idea. Attention as a selective activity determines just which idea of the many possibilities shall be impressed upon the mind. Faith as the activity of the will encourages the tendency of the idea to express itself, and subconscious activities respond to this encouragement.

The element of time is an important factor in the realization of the idea suggested. The length of the period of subconscious incubation varies directly with the complexity of the

The Length of the Period of Subconscious Incubation

idea, other things being equal. Some self-suggested ideas realize themselves almost instantaneously, while others require considerable time to mature. In response to the idea that one is blushing, it is highly probable that the blood will flow to the face in copious quantities at

once. The self-suggested idea of blushing involves a relatively simple subconscious response, and is therefore realized almost instantaneously. On the other hand, a novice may suggest to himself that he is fully competent to render one of Beethoven's sonatas, and fail miserably even after many heroic attempts. The amount of time required for the self-realization of this idea would depend much upon native ability, previous musical training and the complexity of the sonata. In the case of the amateur's attempts to realize this self-suggestion, repeated effort to master the difficult composition and corresponding neural growth would be necessary. The realization of the idea would doubtless consume considerable time.

¹*The Psychology of Religion*, p. 111.

It is a common experience that after a seemingly fruitless attempt to realize a difficult auto-suggestion has been followed by a period of rest, a fresh effort is attended with success. For instance, one may make constant use of auto-suggestion in trying to master the art of typewriting. After a certain degree of skill has been acquired one may fail to detect any appreciable progress despite continued effort and self-suggestion. Let the attempt be discontinued for a season. Resuming the work after the interval of complete rest, one may be astonished at the ease with which he now masters the technique of typewriting. In such a case two things probably occur during the period of rest. Countless hindering mental tendencies which are naturally developed during the course of the unsuccessful effort, doubtless disappear during the period of rest. The more firmly established associations tend to develop during a season of inactivity, while the less deeply entrenched atrophy. The inhibiting tendencies being only slightly drilled in, die out during the time of rest, but the correct impressions being sufficiently ingrained, grow through the nutrient changes set up by the action of the blood.¹ It is quite certain that an intermission in difficult and complex auto-suggestion has a dual effect: on the one hand, it furthers subconscious incubation in the right direction; on the other hand, it tends to uproot hindering associations built up through misdirected effort. If no temporary release from effort occurs in highly complex auto-suggestions, there is grave danger that the wrong impressions through continuous striving and consequent stimulation wax stronger, while the correct associations tend to evaporate.

¹See F. W. Book, *The Psychology of Skill*, p. 117.

In some cases the person reaches a point in his attempts to realize the self-suggested idea where he feels that further effort can avail nothing. Ceasing to strive, he finds the idea realized.

Cessation of Effort

When the suggested idea has been realized beneath the threshold of consciousness, cessation of conscious effort seems to open the way for the emerging of the subconscious result into consciousness. Subconscious development and conscious effort may be looking toward the same end, but from slightly different angles. Slightly misdirected activities of the will guard the entrance into consciousness, but when they relax their vigilance the subconsciously realized idea crosses the threshold. Passivity, apathy, indifference, and sometimes despair, accompany the cessation of effort, but are displaced by satisfaction, interest, exhilaration, and exaltation, when the self-suggested idea is expressing itself above the threshold of consciousness.

In response to auto-suggestion many varieties of activity are affected, such as perception, feeling, memory, action, and reasoning. Looking at the full moon shining in a clear sky, one

The Influence of Auto-suggestion

may see almost anything the notion of which is imposed upon the mind—an illuminated fissure-riven surface, the front view of a fat man's smiling face, or the profile of a woman's face half hidden by her tresses. The mere recollection of a bitter medicine taken weeks before is often sufficient to induce the unpleasant experience of nausea. Memory is influenced when one makes the self-suggestion that he will recall the data with which the mind is charged. An otherwise impossible action, such as the lifting of a heavy weight, is often accomplished as the result of the auto-suggestion that it can be done. The idea that one is equal to a difficult process of reasoning tends to realize itself. It would be difficult to exhaust the possibilities of auto-suggestion, for its use affects the whole gamut of mental experiences.

Arousing an emotion, augmenting an action, inhibiting a sensation, self-suggestion is constantly affecting the mental life.

In an exuberant appreciation of the possibilities of auto-suggestion it is well to remember that it is not omnipotent. There are limits which it cannot transcend. Its limitations are

The Limitations of Auto-suggestion

two-fold: in the first place, its direct influence is restricted to mental processes; in the second place, within its proper sphere its activity is limited by the amount of vitality of the human organism. Since auto-suggestion is not operative outside the scope of personal influence, one is certain to be disappointed if he throws a stone into the air and confidently expects it to remain suspended between earth and sky in response to the idea firmly fixed in mind and believed in that it will behave in that extraordinary manner. It is true that in an extreme case one might be positive that he saw the stone suspended in midair, but this would be an hallucination, a subjective experience. No amount of auto-suggestion will bring the mountain to Mohammed: the most that it can do is to help Mohammed go to the mountain. It must not be forgotten that auto-suggestion has an indirect influence over inanimate objects by affecting the human agent acting upon them. On the other hand, only when there is an adequate degree of force resident within the organism can the suggested idea be realized. When disease has lowered the vitality of the human organism below a certain degree, the life-forces are too weak to realize the idea of health, be it ever so persistently held in mental focus and relied upon by the patient. It would be impossible for the average man to lift a ton by sheer strength of arm in response to the self-suggestion that he is equal to the herculean feat. To realize itself this idea would have to be handed down from one generation to another no one knows how many centuries. Thus we see that auto-suggestion is effective only when it touches the mental life, and that its efficacy is furthermore limited by the supply of energy in the organism.

From the point of view of the form given the suggested idea, all auto-suggestions may be divided into two classes—
 direct and contrary auto-suggestions.

**Direct and
 Contrary
 Auto-suggestion**

A direct auto-suggestion is one which is clothed in the terms of what one is desirous of bringing to pass; a contrary one is stated or thought in the terms of what one wishes to rid the self of or to avoid. The former is positive in form, the latter negative. In successful direct auto-suggestion the response is as intended; the result of a contrary auto-suggestion is often the opposite to what was expected. Assume that a child, afraid of certain dreams which have a tendency to recur, just before falling asleep suggests to himself that he will have a pleasant dream, such as that of success at play or the bestowal of gifts upon himself, and we are dealing with a case of direct auto-suggestion. The self-imposed mental impression is in terms of what is positively desired. But let us assume that the next night the same child suggests to himself that he will not have bad dreams, and thereby passes in review the dreaded nocturnal visitations. This is an instance of contrary suggestion, for he is holding in mental focus the idea of what he is trying to avoid. Since whatever is in the mind tends to express itself, the direct auto-suggestion is likely to be the more efficacious, for it introduces into the mind only what one would have realized. The contrary suggestion is imperiled by negative impressions. Nevertheless, one must not be in haste to infer that contrary auto-suggestions are always failures. But when they are effective the result may be due to the fact that it not infrequently happens that the mere making of the self-suggestion in the terms of the undesirable experience purges the personality of the unwholesome element. Distressing mental states may find an adequate avenue of expression in the process of ideation and emotion. Should the contrary suggestion of the child prove effective in warding off distressing dreams, its success would probably be due to a detailing of the dreaded dreams, which proved to be a vent. But on the whole this form of auto-sug-

gestion is in grave danger of defeating its own purpose by arousing the mental imagery of what is to be avoided.

With reference to the knowledge or ignorance of the person as to the presence or absence of auto-suggestion, both direct and contrary self-suggestions may be subdivided into intentional and unintentional auto-suggestions. When one consciously makes auto-suggestions, fully aware that he is applying their principle with a specific end in view, we may speak of an intentional self-suggestion.

**Intentional and
Unintentional
Auto-suggestion**

A case in point would be the conscious use of auto-suggestion for the purpose of inducing sleep and pleasant dreams. But when a child who is blissfully ignorant of the first principles of auto-suggestion which he nevertheless applies in seeking undisturbed repose, attributes the result to some extraneous agency, such as a guardian angel, we have to do with unintentional auto-suggestion. It is patent that since whatever is unconsciously and unintentionally accomplished is done with the greatest ease and effect, unintentional auto-suggestion is the more efficacious. Note the vast difference between unintentional and intentional imitation! How perfect and easily accomplished the former; how crude and imperfect the latter! The intentional manipulation of the delicate mechanism of auto-suggestion often results in the awkwardness of self-consciousness and in failure. Unintentional auto-suggestion employs the unconscious processes which are economical in the expenditure of effort and yield the larger returns. A friend of the writer relates that one night in a room in a hotel he was unpleasantly aware of the need of ventilation. Raising one window from below and lowering another from above to secure the desired ventilation and circulation, he soon experienced a decided sense of exhilaration. Refreshed, he retired for the night in the same room. In the morning he was surprised to see that all of the windows of the room were re-enforced by storm-windows, which admitted hardly a breath of fresh air, regardless of open windows within. The distinct refreshing which he experienced the previous night must

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be ascribed to unintentional auto-suggestion. Imagine the difficulty, but not at all the impossibility, of obtaining the same reaction under the same conditions through intentional effort.

It will be seen at a glance that auto-suggestion and private prayer have enough in common to make an intelligent analysis

**Factors Common
to Auto-suggestion
and Private
Prayer**

and comparison possible. Both experiences are private and intimate. Both often have their inception in the mind of another. Not unlike a social suggestion, a public prayer may impress itself upon the mind, pass through a process of modification and issue in private prayers.

Biases and prejudices, sentiments and instincts, moods and feelings, memory and judgment, evoke auto-suggestions and private prayers. The success of both is said to depend largely upon concentration of the mind and faith that results will follow. The time spent in realizing a self-suggested idea and in the answering of a prayer is a variable quantity. Like auto-suggestion, prayer may assume a direct and positive, or contrary and negative form. Since auto-suggestion and private prayer have so many characteristic features in common, would it be unreasonable to expect the answer to prayer to be a subconscious phenomenon? Does prayer unintentionally appropriate the method and mechanism of suggestion? Is the field of private prayer co-extensive with that of suggestion? Are unanswered private prayers describable in terms of unsuccessful suggestion? If a rigorous analysis and an impartial comparison compel an affirmative answer to these questions, other and more fundamental queries arise. If prayer may be interpreted in terms of suggestion, is the universe mechanical, or is there beneath the psychological process an element of freedom of the will? What kind of a God is consistent with such a description of prayer? The thoughtful man can construct a spiritual world-view if permitted to hold fast to the existence of a benevolent God, the power of self-direction in man, which makes him morally responsible, and the practical value of religion, especially of prayer. Does a scientific view of prayer con-

serve these essentials? To anticipate; an interpretation of prayer in terms of science is not inconsistent with a doctrine of God, free will and the validity of religion. Although science is concerned with processes as such and not with finalities, nevertheless, in the closing chapter of this study we shall revert to these ultimate considerations and view them in the light of the preceding analysis.

Having made an introductory and preliminary statement of the psychology of auto-suggestion, it yet remains to point out the sources of material on private prayer.

Sources of Material on Prayer

Fortunately, the sources are many and varied. Conversations with persons rich in prayer experiences, religious biography, treatises on prayer from both a psychological and a devotional standpoint, contributed valuable data for the

prosecution of this study. In addition to these various sources of information, about 200 autobiographical accounts of prayer experiences were received in response to four questionnaires.¹ The majority of the respondents are members of such leading protestant denominations as the Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian and Congregational. Both male and female, the clergy and the laity, are represented. A serious effort has been made to discriminate between trustworthy and unreliable responses. The accounts from which important deductions have been made have been selected from the responses of those in whose introspections there is good reason to repose confidence. Many replies, however, have served to illustrate and confirm conclusions drawn from other sources and wider considerations. The comparatively small number of reliable responses has little or no statistical value.

¹Three of them were circulated by three students of Professor J. B. Pratt: Messrs. E. B. Hart, H. S. Todd, S. T. Stanley. The questionnaire sent out by the writer appears in the appendix.

Gathering the strands of this discussion together, it will be recalled that an auto-suggestion was defined as a self-imposed idea which tends to realize itself automatically. The efficacy of

Summary

the self-suggestion depends much upon the impression made upon the mind; it is essential that the idea be ingrafted into the mind in order that it may grow. In the one case the self-suggested idea arises in the mind of another, is introduced into the self, passes through a series of elaborations, thus experiencing an almost entire change of character; in the other case it originates in the conscious or subconscious states of the self. Faith as strained expectation or expectant attention, consciously or unconsciously striving in the direction of the realization of the self-suggested idea, gives point to the subconscious processes. The idea planted in the mind and believed in tends to grow subconsciously, to express itself through the automatic processes of the organism. "In short, mental and motor automatism are the prominent elements of suggestion."¹ In difficult and complex auto-suggestion a period of rest should occur, during which the hindering tendencies may atrophy and the more deeply implanted correct impressions be free to mature. The amount of time consumed in subconscious incubation varies directly with the difficulty and complexity of the suggested idea. It also varies with different individuals, for what may be complex or difficult for some may be relatively simple and easy for others. In order that the subconscious result may present itself above the threshold of consciousness, it is often necessary to cease one's effort to realize the end in view. Despite its unnumbered possibilities the direct influence of auto-suggestion is limited by the immovable boundaries of the mental life. Its control over what is other than psychic is of necessity indirect and through a self. It is possible to overestimate the potency of the organic processes and therefore fail to induce the expected reaction. A direct auto-suggestion is preferable to a contrary one, since the former forestalls the danger of impressing the mind with what it is the

¹Boris Sidis, *The Psychology of Suggestion*, p. 10.

purpose of the auto-suggestion to eliminate or avoid. Since unintentional auto-suggestion is relatively frictionless and artless, it is more effective than intentional self-suggestion. The auto-suggestion of greatest efficiency would doubtless involve an idea self-imposed, direct and positive in form, deeply rooted in the mind, confidently expected to mature, falling within the range of personal influence and subconscious incubation, unintentionally and unconsciously realizing itself through the automatic processes, protected from inhibiting associations by rest-periods, finally permitted to manifest itself above the threshold of consciousness as a subconscious product.

CHAPTER II

ATTENTION IN PRAYER

In symbols peculiar to himself Luther once said, "Just as a good, clever barber must have his eyes and mind upon the beard and razor, so as to mark distinctly where he is to shave, so everything, which is to be done well, ought to occupy the whole man, with all his faculties and members. How much more, then, should prayer, if intended to be effective, engage the heart wholly and without distraction."¹ All writers of devotional literature agree with Luther that a vital element in effective prayer is the concentration of the attention upon the content of the prayer. We are told that one difference between genuine praying and the mere saying of prayers is attention to, and interest in, the act of prayer. In other words, the religionist insists that to be efficacious the prayer must be impressed upon the mind. In this particular he does not differ with the psychologist who recognizes in the introduction of an idea into the mind an essential of suggestion.

It is the aim of this chapter to examine factors which tend to restrict the field of consciousness to the material of private prayer. Now during the course of the natural history of religion many elements have appeared, which tend to direct the stream of consciousness into the channel of prayer. The reference is to such means of attracting and holding the attention as the isolation of the individual, posture of the body, suspension of vision, motor automatism, fasting, emotional states, prayer repetitions, activity

The Prominence of Attention in Prayer

Elements Which Hold the Prayer in Mental Focus

¹J. G. Morris, *Quaint Sayings and Doings of Luther*, p. 131.

of the will, mechanical devices. Let us now see how these accessories conspire to implant the prayer in the mind.

The very expression "private prayer" is suggestive of the isolation of the individual. Of the respondents who answered

Privacy in Prayer

the question contained in the questionnaire, Which do you find the more effective: public prayer by either the minister or the congregation, or private prayer? seventy *per cent.* favored private prayer. John R. Mott says. "In a

word, secret prayer is prayer at its best. It is prayer most free from all insincerity. It is the true gauge of our prayer life."¹ Jesus both taught and practiced privacy in prayer.² It is a truism that the isolation of the individual guards against distractions. Novel impressions, strange changes in the environment, and interruptions by others, tend to hinder the act of prayer. Alone and free from social restraints, the person is at liberty to give his undivided attention to the unreserved and sincere expression of his need. In this way isolation makes for the introduction of the prayer into the mind.

Having found the seclusion of some favored spot, the person may reverently kneel in prayer. There seems to be present with many individuals a desire to cast the self at the feet of God in humble submission. In response to the question, Do you find that posture, such as kneeling, etc., has any influence on your state of mind in prayer? forty *per cent.* answered affirmatively. The following statements imply that the appreciation of the incompleteness of the self induces such a motor response as kneeling: "It (kneeling) is a sign of humility." "Whenever I am burdened with cares I feel an almost irresistible desire to fall upon my knees in prayer." On the other hand, kneeling creates a sense

Physical Posture in Prayer

¹*The Secret Prayer Life*, p. 5.

²See *Matt.* iv, 6 and *Luke*, vi, 12.

of want. Who has not been impressed by the fact that whenever he has had occasion to kneel, be the situation ever so foreign to prayer, he has invariably thought of prayer and as a consequence experienced a haunt of a want? "Kneeling makes one more earnest in prayer," writes a respondent. Kneeling and praying are so closely associated that the one tends to induce the other. Any bodily attitude which has become habitual, naturally resists any proposed departure from its well-established course. When any posture, save the customary one, is assumed doubts as to its propriety arise, which call attention to the physical attitude to the disadvantage of the prayer. Bodily posture makes a definite contribution to the holding of the material of the prayer in mental focus.¹

Seeking privacy and bending the knee, the one engaging in prayer may close or cover the eyes. The extent of this practice

Suspending the Vision in Prayer

may be inferred from the fact that in reply to the question, Do you close your eyes in prayer? seventy-five per cent. of the respondents answered in the affirmative. The following typical reasons for doing so seem commonplace:

"The closing of the eyes shuts out distracting sights." "To concentrate my thoughts." It is self-evident that an interesting environment might furnish impres-

¹The following is a specimen of the various and uncomfortable postures assumed by the members of the Yoga cult of India: "The right foot should be placed on the left thigh, and the left foot on the right thigh; the hands should be crossed, and the two great toes should be firmly held thereby; the chin should be bent down on the chest, and in this posture the eyes should be directed to the tip of the nose." (F. Max Mueller, *Six Systems of Indian Philosophy*, p. 457.) This posture is called Padmasana, lotus-seat, and is highly recommended as a cure for all diseases. The student of hypnotism can readily understand how such a position combined with restraints of breathing produces such a state of abstraction that the person is rendered indifferent to pain and pleasure, hunger and thirst, cold and heat. It represents an extreme method of forcing upon consciousness an impression to be realized.

sions novel enough to attract the attention. But even in a monotonous environment suspension of vision helps to focus the attention on prayer. An object in motion attracts the attention most readily in a monotonous environment. During the evolution of organic life a moving stimulus suggested either well-being or danger, and a corresponding reaction on the part of man or animal resulted. Even to-day a horse will react to a flying sheet of paper. Perhaps it is a heritage from the past when every moving object was regarded with concern, that makes us sensitive to stimuli in motion.¹ Although we fail to note the other familiar distractions of the street, how quickly we attend to an advertisement consisting of electric lights which come and go. Another case in point is the large opening and closing mechanical eye in the oculist's window. When we wish to attract the attention of another at a distance we re-enforce our vocal efforts with suggestive motions of the arms. In a somewhat analogous manner a moving object in an environment ever so familiar or monotonous may drain off to itself the attention which under the condition of closed or covered eyes might have been paid to prayer.

When the person is engaged in the act of prayer a variety of physical activities appear, of which he is unconscious or but vaguely conscious. The reference is to such motor accompani-

Automatism in Prayer

ments of prayer as the swaying or twisting of the body, the clasping or clenching of the hands, the scratching of the head or the pulling of the hair, the closing or the rolling of the eyes, wrinkling of the forehead and the distorting of the face, and the moving of the lips, jaw, tongue, head. Such motor phenomena are often called automatism. E. H. Lindley detects as many as 136 distinct automatism in such kinds of mental effort as serious study, attention and difficult recollection. Their function is two-fold. In the first place, "they are accessory to the mechanism of attention. In

¹W. B. Pillsbury, *Attention*, p. 50.

order that mental activity may be brought to its maximum, and kept there during a period of work, the circulation of the brain must be rendered adequate, and the latent energy of the nerve-cells must be aroused. To aid in accomplishing this, many movements have appeared in the race and in the individual. Their sole *raison d'etre* seems to be that they facilitate the work of the brain."¹ In the second place, it is also a function of the automatism to furnish an outlet for any irrelevant impressions which may be inviting the attention. Impressions foreign to the work of the moment may be discharged through the channels opened by the automatism. "Now the automatism at first aid in increasing cerebral excitation. Under the favorable condition, or concomitant with it, the state of attention waxes in intensity. When it reaches its height the blocking or inhibitory process may act to shut out excitatory currents of the moment. Then the nerve paths of the automatism become the channel for the drafting off of all currents which are excluded from the brain during attention."² Evidently the automatism accompanying prayer have both a stimulating and a conserving effect. Heightening the circulation of the brain, thus setting free latent nervous energy, they are instrumental in generating vitality for the deepening of the prayer experience. Supporting the mechanism of attention, they help to impose the prayer upon the mind. Then they tend to conserve the energy which they have released. Extraneous impressions which tempt the attention, following the line of least resistance, find expression through the avenues opened by the automatic movements. We shall have occasion to make further reference to this unique mental process when we consider the repetition of prayer and the rosary.

¹E. H. Lindley, *Motor Phenomena of Mental Effort*, *Amer. Jour. Psych.*, Vol. vii, p. 512.

²*Ibid*, p. 512.

The isolation of the person, the suspension of vision, the physical attitude, and the automatic movements may accompany fasting as an expression of religious concern. In its extreme form fasting tends to induce ecstasy. "Fasting in excess is a well-recognized means of producing hallucinations, and if undertaken in connection with religious service must tend * * * to produce voices and visions relating to our ethical life * * *

**Excessive
Fasting
in Prayer**

but quite apart from such excesses, fasting in moderation would tend to produce states of mind allied to those produced during hallucination: and furthermore, reducing as it does the vitality sufficiently to overcome any natural demand for spontaneous activities, it must clearly aid one very materially to gain that racial inspiration which most easily arises when reactions of individualistic significance are not called for."¹ It is noteworthy that the higher centers of the mental life are the last to succumb to starvation. "In the face of death by starvation, the most typical of all forms of death, it has been abundantly demonstrated that while all the other organs of the body gradually atrophy, the heart and the kidneys, and more especially the brain, remain exempt."² Although excessive fasting lowers the vitality of most of the organs, the brain seems to receive the support of the heart up to the last beat, and hence the higher mental processes are the last to give way to disintegration. In fact, there is evidence that in certain respects the mind is particularly active and productive during a prolonged fast. Upton Sinclair, a popular author, maintains that some of his best literary work has been done during a fast. It goes without saying that a period of fasting, having a religious significance, is a means of lodging prayers into the mind, prayers answered in terms of visions and voices.

¹H. R. Marshall, *Instinct and Reason*, p 269.

²C. A. Scott, *Old Age and Death*, *Amer. Jour. Psych.*, Vol. viii, p. 78.

It is the practice of many individuals to fast moderately, to abstain from food wholly or in part for a few days or even for one day. Aside from the tendency to create mental states akin to those produced in more exaggerated forms during longer periods of fasting, the total or partial abstinence from food for a shorter time tends to have a disciplinary and conserving effect.

Moderate Fasting

Moderate, or excessive, fasting is a mental discipline which constructs a competent personality. To hold in check the craving for food is an aid in bringing under subjection thoughts prone to wander from the prayer. Who

has not by an act of the will turned his attention away from the many distractions of travel by rail and focused it upon his book in the reading of which he was soon absorbed? The voluntary overcoming of the capricious wandering of the attention imparts to the faculties such a powerful stimulus that an overplus of energy is set free for the task in hand. In like manner he who overcomes the temptation to gratify the desire for food releases a generous amount of energy which may be devoted to the prayer life. Furthermore, in too many instances superfluous nutrition makes a tremendous draught upon the life-forces of the human organism. "Probably from four to six times as much food is eaten as the body actually requires, and this great amount of excess must be disposed of at the expense of the vital powers."¹ Living to eat, many persons expend their powers in vegetating, while those who eat to live may direct into other and more useful channels the energy wasted by others. Moderate fasting, springing from a religious motive, may expend energy in fixing a prayer in mind, which effort might otherwise have been devoted to useless nutritive processes.

¹H. Carrington, *Vitality, Fasting and Nutrition*, p. 112.

It would be passing strange if an individual could withdraw from the presence of others, reverently kneel, close or cover the eyes, make many automatic movements, even fast and pray, without experiencing both pleasant and unpleasant emotions. There are doubtless occasions when the will rather than the emotions controls the prayer experience,

Emotion in Prayer

but in general it is the emotions which prompt the prayer. Situations or predicaments which evoke such emotions as fear, love, doubt, anxiety, exaltation, guilt, gratitude, etc., are pregnant with prayer possibilities. The whole personality dances to the tune of such an overmastering and primitive emotion as fear. J. H. Leuba cites the case of a Mrs. X: "I do not think I bothered with God when I was a child except when I was frightened. Usually I did not care a button for him. Only when I got into a plight I would cling with the completest faith to what I had been taught about God's power and his readiness to answer our prayers."¹ Devotional literature encourages prayer in critical situations. "And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me,"² is the exhortation of the psalmist. The value of the emotional states for the prayer life is admirably set forth in the following quotation taken from a devotional study: "Prayer should spring up spontaneously from an emotive state. Christians, whose lives, in other respects, are not visibly defective * * * have no deep subsoil of feeling from which prayer would be a natural growth. Our theory of the Christian life is that of a clear, erect, inflexible head, not that of a great heart in which deep calleth unto deep."³ Emotions tend to narrow the field of consciousness. Other impressions are ignored when an intense emotion dominates the personality. It is common for a lover to be so possessed of his passion that other important matters are neg-

¹*Fear and Awe in Religion, Amer. Jour. Psych., Vol. ii, p. 9.*

²*Psalm, L, 15.*

³A. Phelps, *The Still Hour*, p. 58.

lected. When the emotion is of religious interest, it tends to introduce prayers into the mind. From this point of view emotions provoke prayer, but it is also true that in many cases prayer arouses the emotions. In the following discussion of the oral repetition of prayer the part which prayer plays in evoking emotional states will receive attention.

Given an initial sense of incompleteness sufficient to attract the attention, a prayer, instead of wearing itself out, becomes an increasingly intensified experience through oral repetition. Without presuming to give a complete description of this unique phenomenon, we may, however, take notice of some of its interesting phases. To begin with, the oral expression itself is a

The Oral Repetition of Prayer

means of holding the attention. St. Teresa said that the first step in a graduated series of religious exercises ending in ecstasy was the articulation of a prayer. Ribot maintains that the oral expression of the prayer leads "the dispersed consciousness into a single confined channel."¹ Experience shows that the habit of reading not merely with the eye, but of articulating the words seen deepens the attention to the contents of the printed pages. Speech is the organ of reason. A spoken dream is likely to be more connected than the one not articulated. It is conceivable that in the case of those whose mental imagery is of the motor and auditory type there is a tendency to clothe a prayer in words as soon as it arises in consciousness. In such instances failure to give oral expression to the prayer would nullify the experience, and the attention would wander elsewhere.

Lest the stream of consciousness be turned into a different channel during a series of reiterations, the prayer as the object

¹*Psychology of Attention*, p. 92.

of attention must be considered from many points of view.

Holding the Attention Through Change in Point of View

“The *conditio sine qua non* of sustained attention to a given topic of thought is that we should roll it over and over incessantly and consider different aspects and relations of it in turn.”¹ Doubtless the laws of association determine the angles from which the aching void evoking a prayer is considered, for one phase of a subject naturally suggests

another. As the attention flits from one aspect of the prayer to another, the emotions are aroused. “One may get angrier in thinking over one’s insult than at the moment of receiving it.”² Viewing the insult from various sides may reveal the true character of the offense and arouse a tumult of emotions. So with each consideration of the incomplete self from a fresh standpoint the prayer experience waxes in emotional intensity. In this way the prayer repetition, begun with but a feeble emotional accompaniment, begets a rich emotional experience. We have seen that emotional states attract and hold the attention. In fact, Ribot insists that “at the root of attention we find only emotional states.”³

The automatic movements of the head, hands, body, etc., which, as we have already seen, are accessory to the mechanism of the attention, play an important part in making the reiteration

Automatism in Prayer Repetition

of prayer a success. It may be of interest to examine the almost unconscious activity of the vocal motor apparatus as a type of automatic phenomena. Its mere exercise sets free an increasing amount of energy until fatigue manifests itself. When stimulated

by a series of slight electric shocks, the leg of a decapitated frog passes through a succession of contractions increasing in ampli-

¹James, *Briefer Course*, p. 236.

²James, *Principles of Psychology*, Vol. ii, p. 443.

³*Psychology of Attention*, p. 35.

tude. The reaction of the frog's leg to the electrical stimulus is due to the release of energy through neural action. Activity increases irritability. "The finely adjusted activities of the nerve-cells which control the muscles reach their perfection only after repeated action."¹ So long as the contractions increase in amplitude anabolism more than just compensates for katabolism. So the activity of the organ of speech liberates an increasing amount of vitality until fatigue asserts itself. In addition to this, there is a quickening of the processes of respiration and circulation. This additional factor is, of course, absent in the case of the dead frog whose leg responds to the electrical stimulus. The almost unconscious exercise of the vocal motor apparatus is a warming-up process, like that employed by athletes and race horses, which arouses the latent energy of the nerve-cells and increases the afflux of blood to the brain, and thus generates power to force the prayer upon the mind. The further activity of the mechanism of speech provides a way of escape for irrelevant impressions. Such a description of the result of the exercise of the vocal organs may seem rather trivial and far-fetched, when one does not consider that each of a hundred or more automatic movements is making its contribution to the prayer experience.

The law of inertia in attention is an important factor in the continued oral expression of prayer. But before this law can be appreciated, the law of accommodation, upon which it depends, must be understood. The law of accommodation may be illustrated in the following way: Looking across the room at the clock, "to see the position of the hands, I must wait for the 'accommodation' of attention, *i. e.* for the adjustment of the mechanism of visual accommodation."² What is hardly noticed at first sight may be more clearly seen as the visual experience continues and a more

The Law of Inertia in Prayer Repetition

¹W. H. Howell, *American Text-book on Psychology*, p. 112.

²E. B. Titchener, *Psychology of Feeling and Attention*, p. 244.

perfect adjustment of the visual mechanism to the stimulus is made. The same law is operative in attention to ideas. James experienced the following adjustment in attending to an ideational stimulus: "In myself the 'backward retraction' which is felt during attention to ideas of memory. etc., seems principally constituted by the feeling of an actual rolling outwards and upwards of the eyeballs, such as occurs in sleep, and is the exact opposite of their behavior when we look at a physical thing."¹ Now when once the mechanism is adjusted it offers a certain resistance to an impression calling for a fresh adjustment. Change of occupation means a corresponding adjustment of the mechanism to be employed. For that reason a diligent student may find himself loathe to interrupt his studies in order to replenish the fire with fuel. The resistance of the adjusted mechanism is known as the law of inertia. When the accommodation of the attention has taken place in prayer, the person, following the line of least resistance, may feel a tendency to repeat the prayer rather than to discontinue it and do something else. To turn the attention to another thing would necessitate the overcoming of the resistance offered by the mechanism adjusted to prayer.

The turning of the attention into a single definite channel opened by articulation, the continuous change in point of view making for the holding of the attention and the arousing of the emotions, the making of automatic movements releasing and conserving energy, the warding off of foreign impressions by the adjusted mechanism,—the cumulative effect of all of these factors is very significant for the reiteration of the prayer and its impression upon the mind. Like the little snow-ball rolling down the mountainside and gathering volume and force until it becomes a mighty avalanche, the prayer born of an appreciation of incompleteness and repeating itself

The Cumulative Effect

¹*Briefer Course*, p. 230.

becomes an experience so intense that all competitors for the attention are driven from the field.

The wide-spread habit of praying at night before retiring is in accord with the best method of introducing an idea into the mind. The person is most suggestible when he feels inclined to sleep.

Prayer at Night

When one is drowsy and ready to retire, the mind is uncritical and does not exercise its corrective powers; hence at this time the prayer glides into the mind without encountering the opposition which might have

been met during the day. Apart from the ease with which an impression is made upon the subconscious at bed-time, the privacy of one's room, the opportunity to assume the habitual devotional posture, and to continue the prayer at will, are elements which help to hold the prayer in mental focus.

It sometimes requires the exercise of the will to concentrate the mind on prayer. Concerning wandering thoughts and

The Will in Prayer

how to recall them, Brother Lawrence has the following to say: "Our mind is extremely roving; but, as the will is the mistress of all our faculties, she must recall them, and carry them to God as their last end. When the

mind, for want of being sufficiently reduced by recollection at our first engaging in devotion, has contracted certain bad habits of wandering and dissipation, they are difficult to overcome, and commonly draw us, even against our wills, to the things of the earth. I believe one remedy for this is to confess our faults and to humble ourselves before God. I do not advise you to use multiplicity of words in prayer, many words and long discourses being often the occasions of wandering. Hold yourself in prayer before God like a dumb or paralytic beggar at a rich man's gate. Let it be your business to keep your mind in the presence of the Lord. If it sometimes wander and withdraw itself from Him, do not much disquiet yourself for that:

trouble and disquiet serve rather to distract the mind than to recollect it; the will must bring it back to tranquility."¹

The most unique mechanical device intended to increase the effectiveness of the prayer life is doubtless the rosary. E. B. Tylor says, "The devotional calculating-machine is of

The History of the Rosary

Asiatic invention; it had, if not its origin, at least its special development among the ancient Buddhists, and its 108 balls still glide through the modern Buddhists hands as of old, measuring out the sacred formulas whose reiteration occupies so large a fraction of a pious life. It was not till toward the middle ages that the rosary passed into Moham- medan and Christian lands, and finding there conceptions of prayer which it was suited to accompany, has flourished ever since."² On the other hand, it is affirmed on Catholic authority that in the period of religious indifference which obtained in France during the thirteenth century, the Virgin personally appeared to St. Dominic, a Spaniard, with a rosary in her hand. She instructed him in the use of the rosary and enjoined upon him the mission of preaching it as a means of spiritual regeneration. Arriving at Toulouse for the purpose of proclaiming the new devotion, he found that in response to a mysterious summons the people had already assembled in the church. At first his preachment of the rosary fell upon un- heeding ears, but when a violent storm arose and the lightning flashed and the thunder crashed, and the statue of the Virgin began to move, even pointing to heaven and to the preacher, the obdurate people were touched, and, casting themselves at the feet of St. Dominic, announced their acceptance of the rosary. It is claimed that more than a hundred thousand deluded Frenchmen returned to the Catholic Church as a result of the conquest of the rosary. The faithful followers of St. Dominic

¹*The Practice of the Presence of God*, p. 35.

²*Primitive Culture*, Vol. ii, p. 372.

carried the rosary into the rest of the countries of Europe and it was quite generally adopted.

The use of the Catholic rosary consists in the union of vocal and mental devotional exercises. Fifteen decades of Hail

Marys are orally recited, each decade, or group of ten, being preceded by a Pater Noster and followed by a Gloria.

The Use of the Catholic Rosary

Five decades constitute a chaplet. During the recitation of each chaplet five "mysteries" from the life of Jesus and

Mary are meditated. There are three groups of "mysteries" of five each: the Joyful Mysteries, the Sorrowful Mysteries, the Glorious Mysteries. The Annunciation, the Visitation, the Birth, the Presentation, the Finding in the Temple, compose the first group, and are called the Joyful Mysteries; the Agony in the Garden, the Scourging, the Crowning with Thorns, the Carrying of the Cross, the Crucifixion, are called the Sorrowful Mysteries; the Resurrection, the Ascension, the Coming of the Holy Ghost, the Assumption, the Coronation of the Virgin, are known as the Glorious Mysteries. In connection with the vocalization of the Pater Noster, ten Hail Marys and a Gloria, the meditation of a "mystery" is undertaken. Consider the Scourging at the Pillar. While the automatic oral repetition is taking place, "the memory presents a large hall full of rude soldiers, who drag in a poor prisoner, pull off His garments, bind Him to a pillar and there tear off the flesh from His bones until His body is all raw and covered with wounds and His blood streaming over the floor. Next the understanding considers who this prisoner is: the adorable Son of the Most High God, the Lord and Giver of Life. And why does He suffer? For miserable sinners: for us ungrateful men: for those who are scourging Him. Now the will is influenced to make acts of compassion, love, adoration, thanksgiving, petition, etc."¹ The Roman Catholic Church grants indulgences to those who are faithful in the use of the rosary.

¹Dominican Father, *The Rosary*, p. 41.

The rosary tends to create a divided self in order that a higher unity may be attained. Like all motor phenomena of mental effort, the automatic recitation of the rosary arouses the mind and provides an outlet for distracting impressions. Furthermore, the oral prayers of the rosary are gentle reminders of the religious life. The associations clustered about the prayers are of such an intimate and sacred nature that the suppliant cannot but respond to their subtle influence. The

The Psychological Value of the Rosary

result would be by no means the same if the alphabet, a part of the multiplication table, and a mother-goose rhyme were substituted for the Pater Nosters, the Aves, and the Glorias. Such a meaningless substitution would rob the exercise of its appropriate suggestiveness. The incongruity of attempting to meditate a "mystery" to such an unsuitable accompaniment would make the exercise difficult, if not impossible. The contemplation of the "mysteries" gives rise to mental pictures out of which there is a tendency to construct prayers. In a word, the rosary, when properly employed, is an admirable device for attracting and holding the attention to the prayer life. The misuse of the rosary will be discussed under the head of "vain repetitions."

It must be clear to the reader that religion utilizes many accessories of attention in order to introduce a prayer into the mind. A summary of the elements discussed may suggest the cumulative effect of the same on the prayer life. The isolation of the individual offers a possibility of uninterrupted and unrestricted self-expression. Posture in prayer, such as kneeling, is

Summary

an outward sign of reverence, and is the natural attitude of a suppliant. The reflex action of posture on prayer is marked. The closing or covering of the eyes during prayer excludes seductive sights. The automatic movements accompanying prayer increase the flow of blood to the brain, thus freeing energy, and distracting impressions are discharged through the func-

tional paths opened by the automatism. Excessive fasting, undertaken as a religious exercise, induces ecstasy: in its moderate forms it is a mental stimulus, devotes to higher ends the energy otherwise expended in superfluous nutritive processes, and arouses mental states akin to, but less intense than, those of ecstasy. As a rule prayer has its genesis in an emotive state. The oral repetition of a prayer, springing from a real religious concern, directs the stream of consciousness into a single definite channel, heightens the processes of circulation and respiration, evokes emotional states, and tends to continue itself in accordance with the law of inertia. It is the custom of many to pray at bed-time when the mind is susceptible to auto-suggestions. While emotions generally prompt prayer, it sometimes occurs that voluntary attention restricts the field of consciousness to the act of prayer. The rosary is a mechanical device arousing mental images which in turn give rise to prayer. All of these accessories of religion, and many more which doubtless have occurred to the reader, tend to hold in mental focus the idea for the realization of which the prayer is made. There can be no doubt that private prayer meets the first indispensable condition of auto-suggestion,—an idea imposed upon the mind by the self.

CHAPTER III

FAITH IN PRAYER

Professor Muensterberg has well said that suggestion is more than the turning of the attention to one idea and away from another, that it is characterized by belief.¹ Among the authorities on suggestion there is no dissent from the opinion that a fundamental requirement of effective suggestion is a lively conviction on the part of the individual that the idea held in mind will be realized. Now prayer also is more than the mere turning of the attention to one idea and away from another,

it too is characterized by belief. Nothing could be more indisputable than that faith looms up large in the answering of prayer. On the one hand, the psychologist is certain that a self-suggested idea depends largely upon faith for its realization, and, on the other hand, the religionist asserts in no uncertain terms that without faith there can be no answer to prayer. In both suggestion and prayer a fact cannot come unless a preliminary faith in its coming is exercised.²

Faith in prayer is practically universal. A few systems of religion, like Shinto and Buddhism, originally tried to dispense with prayer, but failed fully to repress the unconquerable instinct.

The Universality of Faith in Prayer

According to the letter of the tenets of Shinto the prayers of the Mikado of Japan suffice for all of its devotees, but thousands visit the shrines of this cult, deposit a gift of money, and offer prayers. Buddhism also has made concessions to prayer. Buddhism in its purest form seeks to rid the self of all

desire, which logically precludes prayer, for prayer is rooted

¹*Psychotherapy*, p. 100.

²See James, *The Will to Believe*.

in desire. But Buddha has been deified and is being worshipped by millions. The prayer-wheel and the rosary flourish where Buddhism obtains. On the contrary, Christianity has always maintained that prayer is the core of spiritual-mindedness and as such should be encouraged. The fact that prayer is so widespread, even among the adherents of cults logically opposed to it, is an indication of almost universal faith in its efficacy, for it would be meaningless to pray without expecting some reaction.

Quite naturally at this point the question arises, Why does the individual have faith in prayer? A partial answer to this query would be a description of the facts which tend to inspire and conserve faith. Just as there are various factors which lend their assistance in introducing the prayer into the mind, so also there may be discovered many elements influencing faith. Heredity and environment, the reading of devotional literature, the positive testimony of others, the memory of answer to prayer in the past, the favorable interpretation of unanswered prayers, the forgetting of negative cases, the misconstruction of coincident instances, and the repetition of prayer,—all of these facts and many more affect the faith state. Let us examine them one by one.

Facts Which Inspire Faith

It goes without saying that heredity and environment are important factors in determining the kind and degree of faith in prayer. Each person's harvest of the racial life shapes his attitude toward prayer to some extent.

Heredity and Environment

The social heritage is as important as the blood heritage, if it be not more so, in its influence on faith. The social plane into which one is born cannot fail to color the outlook on prayer. The mental environment in terms of education in religion and morals, as well as in the arts and sciences, influences the prayer life. If the hereditary strains, the social pressure, the

mental and moral training, favor the rise and development of a rich prayer life, there is a corresponding stimulation of the faith state. When these factors exert a negative influence, faith in prayer is in danger of being entirely lost.

For many persons religious literature is authoritative and is consequently a stimulus to faith in prayer. The teaching of Jesus concerning prayer is significantly influential. "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive them."¹ "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them."² Such an emphasis on faith as the condition of answer to prayer, coming as it does from the lips of the one to whom is accorded supreme religious leadership, cannot fail to multiply the faith of his followers. Statements like the following taken from the literature of devotion, tend to confirm and repeat the biblical promise that faith in prayer shall have its reward: "Where there is true faith, it is impossible but the answer must come."³ "There is no personal duty more positive or more unqualified than the duty of faith."⁴ "How many prayers are hindered by our wretched unbelief! We go to God and ask Him for something that is positively promised in His Word, and then we do not more than half expect to get it."⁵ "An astronomer does not turn his telescope to the skies with a more reasonable hope of penetrating those distant heavens, than I have of reaching the mind of God, by lifting up my heart at the throne of grace."⁶ Prayer literature fairly teems with such affirmations of the value of faith in prayer: line upon line, precept upon precept, remind the reader that a faith which knows

Devotional
Literature and
Faith in
Prayer

gilt
unbound

¹Matt xxi, 22.

²Mark xi, 24.

³A. Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, p. 78.

⁴H. C. Trumbull, *Prayer, Its Nature and Scope*, p. 69.

⁵R. A. Torrey, *How to Pray*, p. 90

⁶A. Phelps, *The Still Hour*, p. 43.

no shadow of doubt is absolutely essential. In fact, lack of faith is the most frequent explanation of unanswered prayer.

Closely allied to the influence of religious literature on faith, is the testimony of others who have received unquestionable answers to prayer. Our faith is rooted in the faith of others. Faith is contagious. The more suggestible the individual is, the more likely is he to accept the testimony of another and to regulate his own experiences accordingly. To recall definite answers to prayer obtained by another, whose account of the experience is reliable, cannot but encourage one to make a similar venture of faith.

The Testimony of Others

The memory of positive personal prayer experiences is a faith stimulus. The individual waxes bold in his prayer life when he recalls the results obtained during the past. The remembrance of the presence of God in an hour of discouragement, of the healing of a disease, of a conversion experience, of the elimination of evil from the personality, of temporal prosperity, of divine guidance out of a perplexing situation, and of countless other things

The Memory of Past Experiences

wrought through believing prayer, tends to raise faith to a high power of efficiency. James says that the object of remembrance is suffused with a warmth and intimacy to which no object of mere conception ever attains.¹ The successful past prayer experience as the object of recollection is bathed in tender emotion than which there is no more effective means of increasing faith.

¹*Briefer Course*, p. 158.

The usual attitude taken toward unanswered prayers is of such a nature as not to lessen faith. They are generally either interpreted in terms casting no reflections whatsoever on prayer, or they are entirely ignored and forgotten. Negative cases are readily accounted for by the majority in terms of

The Interpretation of Unanswered Prayers

“lack of faith,” “lack of definiteness,” “lack of perseverance,” “improper objects of prayer,” “prayer for things we do not need,” and the like. Some are so indiscriminating that they refuse to

distinguish answered from unanswered prayers, stoutly insisting that “no” is as truly an answer as “yes.” They hold that often Providence withholds the insignificant thing prayed for in order that an infinitely greater blessing may come; that divine Wisdom often overrules our short-sightedness for our own good. In some such way the unanswered prayer when taken into consideration at all is almost invariably converted into a reason for the continuation and increase of faith.

But most of the unanswered prayers are not even accounted for; they are commonly forgotten. The writer knows of no book bearing the title “Unanswered Prayers.” Doubtless an overplus of material would be available for such a study, but such a work would be laughed to scorn by those whose habit it is to ignore negative instances. On the other hand, the market is drugged with a superabundance

Forgotten Negative Cases

of literature on positive experiences in prayer. It seems to be human to forget our failures and to remember our successes: the former we write in the sand, and the latter we chisel in the granite. “We should bear in mind the story of one who was shown a temple with the pictures of all the persons who had been saved from shipwreck after paying their vows. When asked whether he did not now acknowledge the power of the gods, ‘Aye,’ he answered, ‘but where are they painted that were

drowned after paying their vows?"¹ "In the recent Boxer uprising some of the missionaries escaped; and their escape was spoken of as a signal case of answer to prayer. But what of those who did not escape?"² From the foregoing it would be rational to infer that when ten prayers are made and only one of them is answered, as a rule the one successful experience is remembered and made known to others, while the nine dismal failures are graciously overlooked. Thus the unanswered prayer does not affect faith, while the focusing of the attention upon the answered prayer intensifies the faith state.

Faith in prayer is not infrequently so greedy as to take credit for coincident answers. Such it accepts at their surface value. Recently the writer read the case of a certain man who

made the assertion that he prayed God to grant the Americans a bloodless victory over the Spaniards at Manilla.

Coincident Answers

When the news came that without the loss of life on their part the Americans had won the battle of Manilla, the man

rejoiced and steadfastly maintained that the victory was a direct answer to his prayer. What others would unhesitatingly call a mere coincidence,—for prayers for bloodless victories are constantly offered during any war—he accepted as a particular intervention of God in answer to his prayer. He seemed to imply that if he had not made that prayer some Americans would have been killed. In such a case there is presumption and blind acceptance, and but little analysis and discrimination. Francis Bacon calls attention to the tendency to adapt facts to our preconceived notions: "The human understanding is no dry light, but receives an infusion from the will and affections, whence proceed sciences which may be called 'sciences as one would.' For what a man had rather were true he more readily believes." But even the interpretation of certain happenings in terms of answers to prayer when there is no valid reason for doing so multiplies faith.

¹E. W. Scripture, *The New Psychology*, p. 3.

²B. P. Bowne, *The Essence of Religion*, p. 158.

We have already seen how the repetition of a prayer gives birth to several accessories of the attention. In addition to these results, reiteration of the prayer may evoke faith. At first belief may waver like a reed shaken in the wind, but with each successive repetition of the prayer faith may develop. Analogies beyond the pale of prayer are not lacking. A very crass illustration would be the case of a liar who repeats his falsehoods so many times that ultimately he himself believes them. Through reiteration the mental pictures of the falsehoods become clearer and clearer, while the mental imagery of the facts as they really are grows dim. Who has not seen wares so persistently advertised that, although skeptical for a long time, he finally came to believe in their pretended value and made a purchase of the same? Since it is a law of our being that we grow in the direction of exercise, faith increases through faith. In the words of another. "Now there is only one way in which we can learn to trust, and that is by trusting. Therefore, the duty of the man who feels inert and incapable of rising to the level of his belief, is to arouse himself, to say to himself again and again until it has become, as it were, his subconscious possession, 'Trust in God is rational and right, and therefore trust I will.'"¹

Repetition and Faith

It must be conceded that many elements have arisen during the natural history of prayer, which evoke and conserve faith. The question may be asked, Why is it necessary to have faith in prayer? Why do many influential facts stimulate the faith state? What is the function of faith in prayer? An interpretation of faith may answer these questions to some extent. It will be recalled that in the above discussion of the psychology of auto-suggestion it was pointed out that faith is activity in the direction of the self-

An Interpretation of Faith in Prayer

¹E. Worcester, *Religion and Medicine*, p. 319.

realization of the suggested idea. Faith is self-assertion in both auto-suggestion and prayer. Moved by faith the soul beats its wings against the bars of its prison in its endeavor to break through its limitations and live a larger life. In the passages already quoted Jesus makes faith the primary condition of answer to prayer, but in the following quotation he makes activity the condition which must be met: "*Ask*, and it shall be given you; *seek*, and ye shall find; *knock*, and it shall be opened unto you."¹ Now activity and faith are not mutually exclusive, but the former is the expression of the latter. Jesus' exhortation to ask, seek, and knock is a commentary on faith in prayer.² "To believe is to will firmly."³

The justification of faith is that it tends to realize its object. The function of faith is to realize the prayer. The leaning out toward deliverance, which is characteristic of faith,

tends to give point and direction to the subconscious activity of the personality.

The Function of Faith

If we take seriously the doctrine of the unity of life, and the evidence compels us to do so, we must admit that in both auto-suggestion and prayer the reaction

of faith is the same. To say the least, subconscious incubation in response to faith in a self-suggested idea renders the same reaction in response to faith in prayer highly probable. The reading of prayer literature, the testimony of others, the memory of past experiences, the favorable interpretation or the ignoring of negative cases, the misconstruction of coincident answers, the reiteration of one's belief,—all of these factors tend to give rise to longings, hopes, aspirations, strivings, and endeavors, which in turn stimulate the subconscious activities in the direction of

¹Luke xi, 9.

²The popular mind makes no distinction between the two terms faith and belief. While there may be a technical distinction, for present purposes it will be wholly unnecessary to make it. Both words will be used in the same sense and interchangeably.

³A. Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, p. 75.

the answer to the prayer. "The unaccomplished volition is doubtless an indication that new nerve connections are budding, that a new channel of mental activity is being opened; and, in turn, the act of centering force (trying) in the given direction may, through increased circulation and heightened nutrition at that point, itself directly contribute to the formation of those nerve connections, through which the high potential of energy which corresponds to the new insight expends itself."¹ Somewhere James, with his usual poignancy, has said that to know our limitations is in a certain sense to be already beyond them. The fact that the individual who is praying or making an auto-suggestion is wholly ignorant and unconscious of any effort to realize his own prayer or suggested idea, is by no means a valid indication to the contrary. Nevertheless, our inquiry into the nature of the answer to the prayer must be reserved for the following chapters.

It must not be overlooked that while from one point of view faith expresses itself in willing, from another point of view faith is regarded as passivity, inactivity, receptivity, and self-surrender. Writers of devotional literature are one in their preachment of the surrender of the will as an essential of the prayer life. Mr. Murray expresses the opinion of the majority of them when he says, "Faith is simply surrender: I yield myself to the impression the tidings I hear make on me. By faith *I yield myself to the living God.*"² Faith as self-surrender is the casting of the self into the abyss. Like a gambler who has lost all save a paltry sum which he ventures as his last stake, knowing well that he has but little to lose and everything to win, so the person after many seemingly unsuccessful efforts to obtain an answer to his prayer may in utter despair cast himself without reservation upon a higher power as his last hope. The act of surrender is frequently followed by what seems to the person to be a sudden, and often a

¹E. D. Starbuck, *The Psychology of Religion*, p. 111.

²*With Christ in the School of Prayer*, p. 89.

dramatic, answering of the prayer. Now surrender is not peculiar to prayer; it is quite common in auto-suggestion. In auto-suggestion, as pointed out elsewhere, it is often necessary to cease straining in order that the subconscious may report to consciousness. A trite but apt illustration is the recollection of a name after one has given up his efforts to recall it. Faith as active and strained expectation initiates a subconscious process in the right general direction. In order to reach the desired end the subconscious processes may deviate somewhat from the initial tendency given them by conscious effort. When active effort and a corresponding growth of the nervous system are not parallel, a conflict between the two arises. Surrender, or the cessation of conscious striving and trying, dissolves the conflict and thus makes possible the complete realization of the suggested idea or the answering of the prayer. The conflict between the subconscious incubation and the slightly misdirected activity of the will may result in the indifference, apathy, exhaustion, and even despair, which generally precede and accompany the act of surrender. The exhaustion of the emotional brain-centers may stand in causal relation to the person's impression that further striving is useless. But be that all as it may, it seems to be the rule that an attitude of passivity and receptivity must be assumed before a self-suggested idea can be realized or a prayer be answered. Not to insist that surrender is perhaps after all a form of self-assertion, it follows that if this interpretation is not fallacious, from the point of view of its initiatory and stimulating function, faith is the activity of the will, and, that from the point of view of its function to give way to the almost mature subconscious process, faith is the inactivity of the will.

We have seen that psychologists are agreed that a suggestion may be effective regardless of who or what receives credit for the outcome. A firm belief that the suggested idea will be

realized is of prime importance: the identity of the supposed agent is a secondary matter so far as the subconscious reaction is concerned. It does not in the least affect the subconscious processes tending to realize the idea of health whether the patient has faith in a patent medicine or an electric belt. It is significant that answers to prayer are ascribed to diverse agencies. While some believe in a graven image, others believe in a prayer-wheel; while some believe in Buddha, others believe in their ancestors; while some believe in the Virgin, others believe in Jesus; while some believe in an anthropomorphic God, others believe in an immanent God. While almost every conceivable power to which an individual may attach supreme worth and value is appealed to and believed in, all votaries alike testify to the efficacy of prayer. The reliance on such a variety of powers seems to indicate that the answering of prayer itself is independent of the kind of power invoked, for it is faith as such which makes operative the laws of the mental life. There is, for instance, the peculiar practice which makes of prayer a charm, a fetish, a talisman. It is characterized by faith in the mere repetition of prayers rather than by faith in a prayer-answering God. It is a dependence on the mere saying of prayers. A case in point is the following example of the so-called prayer chain, which has been so widely circulated that it has become a veritable nuisance:

“Lord Jesus, I implore thee to bless all mankind. Keep us from evil by thy precious blood and make us to dwell with thee in eternity. This is an exact copy of an ancient prayer. Copy it and see what will happen. It is said in Jerusalem that he who will not copy it will meet with misfortune, but he who will write it nine days beginning with the day he receives it and shall send it each day to some friend will on the ninth day experience some great joy and will be delivered from all calamities. Make a wish while writing this and do not break the chain.”

**Attributing
the Answer to
Prayer to Diverse
Agencies**

**Faith in a
Prayer Chain**

J. G. Brown

The incessant and utterly meaningless repetition of the Lord's Prayer on the part of numberless persons savors of the magician's incantations. It looks as if many had substituted the saying of a prayer for the waving of the magician's wand. The Rev. F. W. Robertson deplors a similar practice of his boyhood. He says, "I recollect when I was taken up with nine other boys at school to be unjustly punished, I prayed to escape the shame. The master, previously to flogging all the others, said to me; 'Little boy, I excuse you; I have particular reasons for it,' and in fact, I was never flogged during the three years I was at that school. The incident settled my mind for a long

Faith in Prayer as a Talisman

time; only I doubt whether it did me any good, for prayer became a charm. I fancied myself the favorite of the Invisible. I knew I carried about a talisman, unknown to others, which would save me from all harm. It did not make me any better, it simply gave me security, as the Jew felt safe in being the descendant of Abraham, or went into battle under the protection of the Ark, sinning no less all the time."¹

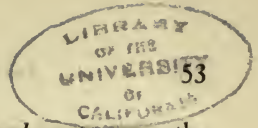
A somewhat higher type of this variety of prayer experience is represented in the following quotations: "Times without number, in moments of supreme doubt, disappointment, discouragement, unhappiness, a certain prayer formula, which by degrees has built itself up in my mind, has been followed, in its utterance, by quick and astonishing relief."² In a letter to a friend F. W. Myers writes as follows:

Faith in a Prayer Formula

"Plainly we must endeavor to draw in as much spiritual life as possible, and we must place our minds in any attitude which experience shows to be favorable to such indrawal. *Prayer* is the general name for that attitude of open

¹*Life and Letters*, p. 52.

²Unbekannt, *Outlook*, Vol. lxxxiii, p. 858.



and earnest expectancy. If we then ask to *whom* to pray, the answer (strangely enough) must be that *that* does not much matter. The prayer is not indeed a purely subjective thing;—

Faith in Prayer as an Attitude of Open Expectancy

it means a real increase in intensity of absorption of spiritual power or grace; but we do not know enough of what takes place in the spirit world to know how the prayer operates;—*who* is cognizant of it, or through what channel the grace is given. Better let children pray to Christ, who at any rate is the

highest individual spirit of whom we have any knowledge. But it would be rash to say that Christ himself *hears us*: while to say that God hears us is merely to restate the first principle,—that grace which flows in from the infinite spiritual world."¹

While many facts sustain the conclusion that it is faith, and not necessarily who or what is appealed to and acknowledged as the grantor of the request, which initiates subconscious processes tending to realize the prayer, it should not be overlooked that

The World-view and the Prayer

the kind of things prayed for varies somewhat with one's interpretation of the power implored. While a theology cannot influence the forces answering a prayer, and while it would be the world's greatest tragedy if the answer to prayer depended on a proper concep-

tion of God, nevertheless, it is reasonable to infer that a low conception of the character of God begets prayers of a correspondingly low type, while on the other hand, a higher conception of the character of God begets prayers on a higher ethical plane. Prayers cannot but reflect to some extent the world-view held by the person.

This chapter has discussed faith in prayer in its various aspects. We have seen that it is essential to both auto-suggestion and prayer. The strains of heredity, the social pressure,

¹Cited in James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 476.

suggestion and imitation, religious training, either decrease or increase faith. The reading of devotional literature, the testimony of others who lead rich prayer lives, the memory of personal and positive experiences, the favorable interpretation of unanswered prayers, the forgetting of many negative cases, the acceptance of coincident answers at their surface value, the repetition of the prayer,—all of these elements and many others conspire to create and augment the faith state. In its early stage the function of faith is to arouse and shape the subconscious activities upon which the answer to prayer depends. Later one must assume an attitude of passivity and receptivity in order that the opposition of conscious effort to the rapidly maturing subconscious product may be withdrawn. The variety of powers implored to answer the prayer is an indication that faith is the pertinent factor, while the identity of the power invoked is a secondary matter. The character of the prayer is, however, a

Summary

partial disclosure of the person's philosophy. The efficacy of auto-suggestion is independent of who or what is accredited with the result. Thus far we have seen that attention and faith in prayer are in terms of introducing an idea into the mind and having an unshaken confidence that the answer will come. It yet remains to be seen whether or not the answer is really a subconscious phenomenon coming in response to a self-imposed idea. If the answer to the prayer is not a subconscious product, a description of private prayer in terms of auto-suggestion breaks down at the crucial point. It is now our task to examine the answers to prayer themselves in order to test the validity of what the study of attention and faith has led us to anticipate.

CHAPTER IV

THE ANSWER TO PRAYER

What is the nature of the phenomenon which comes in answer to the prayer? Is it a product of the normal processes of our mental life, or is it independent of and at variance with the natural order? Is it describable in terms of subconscious incubation, or is it totally unlike anything else with which we are acquainted?

Method of Analogy Used in Investigating the Answer to Prayer

In the following attempt to answer these vital questions, the method of comparing each typical form of answer to prayer with related subconscious phenomena will be adopted. This method of procedure is called the method of analogy. If it can be conclusively shown that answers to prayer and kindred subconscious phenomena are identical in their fundamental aspects, the inference may be logically drawn that they are of the same general character. The value of this method will depend upon a real identity in the important characteristics of the phenomena compared; the resemblance must be essential to the very nature of the things under consideration. The points of correspondence must be weighed rather than counted, for it would be fallacious to conclude that two things are of a piece when they are identical in a large number of minor aspects and radically different in only a few essential respects.

The many varieties of prayer experience, which are possible to the individual, make a classification of prayers extremely difficult. Tentatively, petitional prayers may be divided into two classes: prayers answered through the self, and prayers answered through another self. Prayers falling under the first division are answered through the life-forces within the organism itself, and those of the second class are answered through the cooperation of two or more selves. This classification is in agree-

ment with the classification of suggestion into auto-suggestion and social suggestion. Prayers answered through the self have a

Classification of Prayers

special correspondence to auto-suggestion, and those answered through a co-operating self are related to social suggestion. This chapter will be devoted to a study of the answers to prayer of the first class, *i. e.* of those coming through the praying self. Under this head we shall consider the prayers for regeneration, the elimination of evil, the cure of disease, divine guidance. It will be well to bear in mind that the purpose of this chapter is not so much to discover which prayers may be interpreted in terms of social suggestion and which in terms of auto-suggestion as it is to inquire into the nature of the answer.

The wonderful experience of regeneration is quite generally attributed to the power of believing prayer. In fact, conversion and prayer have so much in common that when the psychology of the former is understood, the psychology of many prayers is also clear. Fortunately, Professors Leuba, Starbuck, Coe, James, and others have written the psychology of conversion, and have therefore practically discussed the type of prayer involved. Scattered throughout Profes-

Regeneration and Prayer

sor Starbuck's exhaustive inductive study there are many autobiographical accounts of the conversion experience in terms of prayer. Dr. Starbuck is driven to conclude that the re-birth of the personality is largely a subconscious process. When the process of regeneration is marked by well-defined crises, a narrowing of the field of consciousness, faith as strained expectation, self-surrender, and elation are recognizable. In most cases it is impossible to determine to a finality whether the prayer for conversion has its inception in an auto-suggestion or a social suggestion, but under normal conditions the subconscious activities are the same in both kinds of suggestion. Let us trace the

elements which look toward the subconscious content of the answer to the prayer for conversion.¹

The prayer expresses the disquieting sense of undoneness and the yearning for the larger self. "There are forces in human life and its surroundings which tend to break the unity and harmony of consciousness; and its unity once destroyed, the contrast between what is, and what might be, gives birth to ideals and sets the two selves in sharp opposition to each other."² Matthew Arnold in his "Buried Life" has described this state of mind as follows:

**Narrowing the
Field of
Consciousness**

"From the soul's subterranean depth upborne
As from an infinitely distant land,
Come airs, and floating echoes, and convey
A melancholy into all our day."

So long as this mental distress obtains the person does not need to force himself to pray; his inner conflict is so great that it in itself is sufficient to drive him to his knees. His emotions are aroused, he prefers solitude, he fasts or eats sparingly, he prostrates himself, he reiterates his petition for salvation,—all of which intensifies his prayer experience. It is needless to add that under these circumstances the prayer for deliverance is attended to to the exclusion of other impressions, that it is imposed upon the mind.

The person may for a long time continue to be apparently unsuccessful in his efforts to bring about the answering of his

¹Since no distinction between conversion and regeneration is necessary in this discussion, none is made.

²E. D. Starbuck, *The Psychology of Religion*, p. 155.

prayer for conversion. Nature's way of healing the breach in the mental life is to widen it. The subconscious growth of a new personality is a complex process requiring considerable time and repeated stimulation. The seeker strengthens his faith by reading biblical and other devotional literature, by recalling the conversion of others, by repeating to himself his assurance of being heard. He feels encouraged to keep on praying till

Strained Expectation in Regeneration

the light comes to scatter the darkness. What he longs for, leans out toward, strives for, and expects is a cue for the subconscious activities. Faith as effort and the subliminal self interact on each other and thus bring to pass the consummation ardently desired. In christendom where Jesus is the acknowledged moral leader, the subconscious processes of the seeker naturally cluster about a conception of him. To hold in mind the Christ-like ideal, and to believe in the possibility of attaining it, is the first step toward its actualization.

It may be alleged that in some cases the interval between the making of the prayer and its answer in terms of the new life is altogether too short to admit the possibility of the slow subconscious growth of a new personality. This argument is advanced by those who still cling to the conception that in order to have a divine source a phenomenon must be independent of natural law. The experience of St. Paul is frequently mentioned in support of the allegation that that the process of conversion lies wholly outside a natural causal series. Those

Sudden Conversions

who are of this opinion fail to take into account that although consenting to Stephen's death, Paul was too broadminded not to have been profoundly moved by the eloquent apology and heroic spirit of the martyr. Neither should one overlook the probability that the moral integrity of the Christians whom Paul persecuted could not have been lost upon one with his passion for righteous-

ness. Furthermore, it is significant that between his vision before the gates of Damascus and his baptism three days of fasting and prayer intervened. Superintendents of rescue missions and popular evangelists are constantly referring to persons who come to a religious service without previous interest in their own religious life and experience regeneration before the gathering is dismissed. In reply two things must be held fast. In the first place, no observer can deny that soon after the excitement of a revival is over many of the converts of the peripatetic evangelist "backslide." The instability of many may be due to a lack of preparation coupled with a forced, hot-house growth of the religious life, induced by the spell of the revivalist. The more permanent rescue mission doubtless prevents many losses by training its converts in religion and morals, and by enlisting them in social service, by means of which the new life develops and finally becomes a subconscious possession, even though the conversion experience was superficial. In the second place, no one will deny that many of the so-called sudden conversions are permanent. There is reason to question whether these stable cases are not invariably influenced by previous religious impressions made, perhaps years before, by the home and church. Deep down in the life of the one experiencing a sudden answer to his prayer for conversion there have doubtless been antecedent yearnings and a reaching out for a better life, which have resulted in a corresponding growth of the nervous system. An opportune word from the lips of a revivalist may be the spark which explodes into consciousness what has been maturing subconsciously for some time.

Parallels of subconscious incubation in response to straining are common in realms other than the religious, if one may make the distinction for the sake of clearness. The subconscious activity

Parallel Cases of Subconscious Incubation

in such mental processes as the solution of a mathematical problem during sleep, the acquisition of skill in piano-playing, the conception of a plot for a novel, the recollection of seemingly forgotten data, the contrivance of an invention, is too generally recognized

and admitted to make further comment necessary. The follow-

ing account of the steps by which a recent writer of a systematic theology reached what he calls his racial theory of the atonement will indicate the kinship existing between the answering of the prayer for regeneration and subconscious activity in general: "For six years (preceded by twelve years of double attitude) I tried to preserve these three important qualities (of the three great historic theories of the atonement) by the method of eclectic synthesis; but the result was so mechanical that I was at last obliged to throw it away. I had become hopeless, when there suddenly came to me a vision of the full meaning of the human race. This vision not only vitalized, but actually transformed, my entire theological situation. I saw not merely the atonement, but every doctrine, and the total combination of doctrine, in a new light. From that supreme hour (on one of the hills near Marburg) my one aim has been to get that racial vision into living expression."¹

In his dire extremity the seeker, feeling that further straining would be useless, ceases to struggle and at once experiences a sense of pardon and deliverance from sin, together with a sense of oneness and unity with God or Christ. We have seen that cessation of conscious effort dissolves any conflict which may have

Surrender in Conversion

developed in the course of the interaction between the subconscious activities and the activity of the will. Before the new self can blossom into consciousness all opposition to the subconscious processes must be withdrawn. As examples of self-surrender followed by the functioning of the new self the experiences of Carlyle and John Wesley may suffice. After a long period of mental anguish and three weeks of total sleeplessness Carlyle "authentically took the Devil by the nose," and thus addressed himself, "What art thou afraid of? Wherefore, like a coward, dost thou forever pip and whimper and go cowering and trembling? Despicable biped! What is the sum total of the worst that lies before thee? Death? Well, Death: and say

¹O. A. Curtis, *The Christian Faith*, p. 316.

the pangs of Tophet too, and all the Devil and Man may, will, or can do against thee. Hast thou not a heart; canst thou not suffer whatever it be; and, as a child of freedom, though out-cast, trample Tophet itself under thy feet, while it consumes thee? Let it come then; I will meet it and defy it. And as I so thought there rushed like a stream of fire over my whole soul; and I shook base fear away from me forever. I was strong, of unknown strength, a spirit, almost a god. Ever from that time the temper of misery was changed; not fear or whining sorrow was it, but indignation and grim-eyed Defiance * * * It is from this hour that I incline to date my spiritual new-birth or baphometric fire-baptism; perhaps I directly thereupon began to be a man"¹ Wesley's experience may be regarded as a somewhat more normal type. For years he strove toward deliverance from a divided self. Reluctantly attending a little meeting of a few pious souls met for prayer and Bible study, he found peace while someone was reading Luther's preface to St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans. Wesley himself says, "About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt that I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death." Both Carlyle and Wesley exercised the will in the direction of a more victorious self until the old foundations of life became so insecure and shaken that they finally cast themselves without reservation upon the deeper-lying self ready to assert itself. The unification of consciousness, the healing of the breach created by the opposition between the old self and the ideal self, the functioning of a wider, more competent personality, relieved the strain and tension, and evoked a sense of deep peace.

Analogous cases of the subconscious reporting to consciousness and resulting satisfaction when an attitude of inactivity and receptivity is assumed are so numerous that a selection is em-

¹See *Sartor Resartus*.

barrassing. Of the two following examples the first emphasizes the cessation of conscious effort, and the second the sense of relief. It occurred to Mr. F. H. Wen-

Analogous Cases

ham, an amateur optician, that the binocular microscope devised by M. Nachet might be improved by means of a prism of a certain shape. "He thought of this a great deal, without being able to hit upon the form of prism which would do what was required; and as he was going into business as an engineer, he put his microscopic studies entirely aside for more than a fortnight, attending only to his other affairs. One evening, after his day's work was done, and 'while he was reading a stupid novel,' thinking nothing whatever of his microscope, the form of the prism that should answer the purpose flashed into his mind. He fetched his mathematical instruments, drew a diagram of it, and worked out the angles which would be required; the next morning he made his prism, and found that it answered perfectly well; and it has been on this plan that all the 'binoculars' hitherto in ordinary use in this country have been since constructed."¹ Note the element of satisfaction and elation in the following account of the discovery of the method of quaternions. Its author, Sir. W. Rowan Hamilton, writes: "Tomorrow will be the fifteenth birthday of the Quaternions. They started into life or light, full-grown, on the 16th of October, 1843, as I was walking with Lady Hamilton to Dublin, and came up to Brougham Bridge. That is to say, I then and there felt the galvanic circuit of thought *close*; and the sparks which fell from it were *the fundamental equations between i, j, k; exactly such* as I have used them ever since. I pulled out, on the spot, a pocket-book, which still exists, and made an entry, on which, *at the very moment*, I felt that it might be worth my while to expend the labor of at least ten (or it might be fifteen) years to come. But then it is fair to say that this was because I felt a *problem* to have been at that moment *solved*,—an intellectual *want re-*

¹W. B. Carpenter, *Mental Physiology*, p. 538.

lieved,—which had *haunted* me for at least *fifteen years before*"¹

It may confirm the contention that the answer to the prayer for regeneration is a subconscious product to point out that conversion is not peculiar to Christianity, that it is a universal phenomenon. As examples of conversions other than Christian we shall note the experience of Buddha and that of the Sioux Indian of the Omaha tribe. At twenty-nine Buddha, hungering for the higher values, made his great renunciation, leaving his beloved wife, infant son, and magnificent home. After seven years of what seemed to be hopeless and fruitless searching "one night, the old traditions relate, the decisive turning point came, the moment wherein was vouchsafed to the seeker the certainty of discovery. Sitting under the tree, since then named the Tree of Knowledge, he went through successively purer and purer stages of abstraction of consciousness, until the sense of omniscient illumination came over him * * * 'When I apprehended this,' he is reported to have said, 'and when I beheld this, my soul was released from the evil of desire, released from the evil of terror, released from the evil of ignorance. In the released awoke the knowledge of the release: extinct is re-birth, finished the sacred course, duty done, no more shall I return to this world; this I know.'"² Among the Sioux Indians the adolescent boy is sent forth upon some hill to cry to Wakonda without asking for anything in particular. "By training his mind and body for days, the Sioux boy expels from his mind concepts discordant with this course of action. He fills his mind with the pictures of heroes; these heroes are the animals; and their deeds are examples of life * * * Moistened earth is put upon his head and face, a small bow and arrows are given him. He seeks a secluded spot on some high hill; and under the pines he chants the prayer; he lifts to heaven his hands wet with tears and then lays them on the earth; he fasts, until at last after some days he falls into a sleep or trance. If in his dream or trance he hear

¹Cited in *ibid.*, p. 537, also in E. D. Starbuck, *The Psychology of Religion*, p. 110.

²H. Oldenberg, *Buddha*, p. 107.

or see anything, that thing is to become the special mediator through which he receives aid. Then, the ordeal over, the youth returns for food and rest. No one questions him, but at the end of four days he confides his vision to some old man, and starts to find the animal he has seen in his trance. The totem is the symbol of this animal * * * By it his natural powers are to be re-inforced so as to give him success as a hunter, victory as a warrior, and even ability to see into the future."¹

A sense of incompleteness, a narrowing of the field of consciousness, a straining after deliverance, and an automatic realization of the new self, are common to all forms of conversion. The various forms of answers to prayer for a re-birth of the self and their parallel cases in the field of subconscious phenomena betray essential likenesses, and warrant the conclusion that all

Essential Resemblances in All Conversions and Their Parallels

are of the same general nature. This does not imply that there is no difference between a conversion and the solution of a mathematical problem during sleep, or between the conversion of a Christian and a Sioux Indian. The difference is one of ideas held in mind.

This ideal in mind tends to express itself regardless of its nature. The kind of conversion experienced conforms to the ideas and ideals impressed upon the mind. The ideal of Buddha was extinction; the ideal of a Sioux is an animal; the ideal of a Christian is Jesus. Buddha's experience tended to conform to his ideal of the extinction of desire; the experience of the Sioux boy tends to conform to his attention to the wild animals; the experience of a Christian tends to realize a Christ-like ideal. Ideas are seeds that grow, and their quality and kind determine the subconscious harvest. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

As a rule many bad habits are permanently broken through the conversion experience, but occasionally a post-conversion process is necessary for the elimination of particularly deeply

¹J. H. Woods, *The Practice and Science of Religion*, p. 65 ff.

rooted evil habits. Conversion may be regarded as a re-creation of the whole personality, while the elimination of a specific evil touches only a part of the self. As an example of the power of

The Elimination of Evil Habits

prayer to uproot a bad habit the following case may prove illuminating. A farmer confesses that although he had been soundly converted and had joined the church, he was still subject to violent fits of temper. For a long time he prayed for self-control, but without any appreciable result. One day a steer broke through a fence and, going into a corn-field, began to destroy the corn standing in shocks. The rest of the cattle were not long in following his lead. By the dint of much labor the farmer drove the herd from the field, but the vexation cost him a paroxysm of rage. Humiliated and penitent that he had given way to his besetting sin, he then and there fell upon his knees, and prayed God to deliver him from this evil. While in the act of prayer a sweet, soothing, and comforting feeling came stealing over him, and he arose from his knees, realizing that at last he had been set free. Although often sorely tried and tempted he has retained self-mastery from that day.

His conversion was doubtless genuine, but as to self-control it was potential rather than actual in its immediate effects. The activity of self-control did not have time to become sufficiently drilled in before the old tendency to give way to outbursts of temper re-asserted itself. The old neural paths had

The Psychology of the Elimination of the Bad Habit

either not been wholly assimilated into the new and higher centers, or suffered an entire atrophy of disuse, and therefore perhaps after the exhilaration of a dramatic conversion had subsided, the former ruling passion began little by little to re-organize the remnants of its functional paths. A conflict between the old channels of discharge and the newly functioning personality ensued. Then followed a persistent effort to unify consciousness through prayer. Attention was directed to the vulnerable spot in the self, a

belief in the efficacy of prayer to eliminate the evil obtained, and a corresponding growth of the nervous system resulted. Complete surrender characterized the prayer when deliverance came. The casting of the self upon God when conditions were auspicious opened wide the way through which the energy was shot in the new direction. The instantaneous unification of consciousness eliminated tension, and gave rise to a state of exaltation.

Fundamentally, all bad habits are broken in the same way. Analogies outside the field of prayer may be found in the use of hypnotic suggestion for the purpose of eliminating evil. Alcoholism, lying, cowardice, kleptomania, sexual disorders, and other defects of character have been successfully treated by ex-

The Elimination of Evil Through Hypnotic Suggestion

perimenters in hypnotism.¹ The elimination of evil through prayer and the same thing accomplished through hypnotic suggestion are identical in their important respects. Both involve a mental impression and its automatic realization. Note the following paral-

lel: "Dr. W. E. Harlow hypnotized a young man who was addicted to cigarette smoking. In the hypnotic condition he told the young man that if he ever smoked again it would make him sick. He had the subject repeat: 'If I smoke it will make me sick. I will vomit.' The next day when he lighted his cigarette he became sick instantly and vomited. He gave up the habit of smoking."²

The phenomenal growth of many varieties of cults based on a more or less occult method of healing diseases is an eloquent

¹See Thirty Authors, *Hypnotism and Hypnotic Suggestion*, p. 227 ff.

²J. V. Coombs, *Religious Delusions*, p. 138.

testimony to the fundamental desire for the fullness of physical life. The deep concern for physical efficiency is often expressed in the prayer for the cure of disease.

**Prayers for
the Cure
of Disease**

As an example of the curative power of prayer take the case of a young mother who recovered from blood-poisoning in answer to her petition. The ailment was incidental to confinement, and threatened to prove fatal despite the

skill of the attending physician and the power of earnest prayer. When the physician had given her up, she resigned herself to what she believed to be the inevitable and took leave of her husband and friends. By mistake the nurse in attendance placed upon the abdominal organs of the patient a cloth saturated with turpentine instead of the witch-hazel prescribed by the physician. The application caused excruciating pain, but from that hour the patient began to mend. Both husband and wife attributed the cure to prayer answered through the seeming blunder of the nurse.

A practicing physician assures the writer that the application of the cloth soaked with turpentine had nothing to do with the cure. On closer inspection one is led to conclude that the cure was due to certain elements of suggestion common to all

**Factors Common
to All
Faith Cures**

forms of mental healing. The prayer for health was introduced into the mind. In all the varieties of faith cure we find a restriction of consciousness to the idea of health. The Emmanuel Movement insists that the patient banish all thought of disease and concentrate the mind on the idea of health.¹

Christian Science goes so far as to declare the non-existence of disease itself.² In the above case there was a faith straining in the direction of health. It is an undisputed fact in mental therapeutics that the firm

¹See E. Worcester, *Religion and Medicine*.

²See M. B. Eddy, *Science and Health*.

expectation of the cure is indispensable to its realization. Dr. H. H. Goddard found that in all forms of mental healing there is the same underlying principle that the idea of health tends to produce health in proportion to the strength of the idea.¹ So far as the cure itself is concerned it does not matter what particular power is appealed to and believed in so long as there is an unshaken faith that health will be restored. Faith in the curative power of the royal touch is as effective as faith in a fragment of the true cross. Furthermore, it is significant that the patient began to improve when she ceased to struggle for health. Doubtless the act of resigning herself to what she believed to be the approach of death was in fact a form of self-surrender which loosened fresh springs of vitality strong enough to withstand the onslaught of the poisonous elements, and to discharge them through the excretory organs or to absorb them. The idea of health held in mind, believed in, and automatically realized, is common to all forms of divine healing and mental therapeutics.

The following parallel to the answer to the prayer for the cure of disease is doubly instructive, for it shows that both health and disease may be induced by the mind, that suggestion works both ways. "I was to deliver the annual address before a college graduating class. When I arose in the morning I was too hoarse to speak. What must I do? The students depended upon me. I decided to resort to quinine; went to a drug friend and asked him for twenty-five cents' worth of two-grain capsules. I went to my room and began to take the capsules every fifteen minutes. In two hours my cold was breaking; I could talk some, and I was wet with perspiration. I became alarmed and told my attendant to examine the capsules to see if there were two grains in them. On examination the capsules were found to be empty. The druggist thought I wanted to fill the capsules myself. I had taken no quinine, but my cold

**Inducing Health
and Disease
Through Suggestion**

¹*Amer. Jour. Psych.*, Vol. x, p. 431 ff.

was cured, and I delivered my address * * * When I related my experience with the empty capsules in a lecture at Lorain, O., two sisters were much amused. They came to me and told me this story: The nurse prepared some capsules for the two sisters who were sick; one was cured, and the other was made sick by the *nasty bitter quinine*. By mistake they had taken the empty capsules."¹

With reference to the influence of suggestion in the cure of disease Professor C. E. Seashore points out four groups of cases in which it is more or less effective.² 1. Functional diseases like gastric and nervous disorders. These may be directly cured through suggestion. 2. Organic diseases. These may be ameliorated through suggestion, as when pain is relieved. A crisis in an organic disease may be successfully passed through the influence of suggestion. 3. Diseases which heal without any specific treatment, like typhoid and pneumonia. Here suggestion may be a tonic. 4. Surgical cases. In addition to creating an atmosphere of good cheer, suggestion serves as an anaesthetic in surgical operations. The case of St. Augustine, who was relieved of the toothache in answer to prayer, is duplicated by the experience of Professor Coe, who underwent a painless dental operation as a result of auto-suggestion. In a word, functional diseases may be directly and permanently cured by suggestion alone, while organic disturbances may find it auxiliary. It is doubtful whether the prayer for the cure of disease transcends the limits of suggestion. A medical practitioner recently remarked to the writer that if prayer could always cure us, none of us would ever die. In their attempts to establish their claims that organic diseases and cases usually referred to the surgeon are curable by faith, the advocates of an extreme form of divine healing have displayed more zeal than knowledge. The alleged proofs for the validity

The Province of Medical Medicine

¹J. V. Coombs, *Religious Delusions*, pp. 141-142.

²*Lectures on Psychology*, (unpublished).

of their so-called test cases have been uniformly exploded when scientists have examined them.

As an example of the lack of scientific precision which generally obtains in the collecting of test-cases revealing evidences of supernatural healing, Mr. Coombs quotes the following case cited with approval by Dr. A. J. Gordon in his book,

**A Test Case
Critically
Examined**

The Mystery of Healing: "A boy of ten years of age fell and broke his arm. A surgeon was called, and the arm was bandaged. The next morning the boy said to his father: 'Please take off these bandages, my arm is well.' 'Oh no, my son, you will have to wear the splints for several weeks.' 'Papa, do you believe in prayer? Last night I asked Jesus to cure my arm and He did it.' To please the boy the bandage was removed, and the arm was absolutely well." The case was widely regarded as a remarkable instance of answer to prayer, but on scientific investigation was found to be spurious. The boy whose arm was broken is now a physician and diagnoses the case as follows: "The broken arm was only a green-stick fracture of the forearm, and after having it bandaged for several days the splints were removed to please a spoiled boy. The bone would have united in a few days of its own accord. After the splints were removed, the arm was carried for several days in a sling. This is the miracle. Some religious enthusiast started the story. I am that boy, and do not crave this notoriety. CARL H. REED."¹

As to the relative merits of the various forms of faith cure, let two authorities speak: Dr. T. B. Hyslop, a specialist in nervous disorders, says, "I would state that of all hygienic measures to counteract disturbed sleep, depressed spirits, and all the miserable sequels of a distressed mind, I would undoubtedly give the first place to the simple habit of prayer."² Dr. H. H.

¹*Religious Delusions*, pp. 147-148.

²*Outlook*, Vol. lxxxii, p. 110.

Goddard, who has made a special study of faith cures, has this to say: "Religion has in it all there is in mental therapeutics, and has it in its best form. It teaches temperance in the broadest sense, high ideals and a dependence upon the Highest alone. This preserves those who know it, by practice as well as by precept, from most of the ills that make up the list of those curable by mental methods. But further, it teaches a wise submission to the inevitable, a freedom from care and worry, and the spirit of hopefulness. And these are the exact conditions aimed at in all mental practices."¹

**The Relative
Merits of
Faith Cures**

Passing on to another form of prayer, let us examine the answer to the petition for divine guidance in perplexing situations. The answers to this type of prayer range all the way from mental repose and poise which enable the person to solve his problems successfully through the ordinary processes of reasoning or the regulating of the usual motor activities, or both, to an inward illumination coming with all the force of a divine revelation. In many cases conscious intellection or physical activity, or a combination of both, utterly fails to find a way out of a difficulty. It not infrequently happens that what conscious effort alone fails to accomplish is successfully done through the co-operation of the subconscious.

**The Prayer for
Divine Guidance**

In many cases mental poise attained in answer to prayer is the chief condition necessary to proper readjustment of the individual in a predicament. A respondent writes, "Many times prayer calms the heart and mind so that the person can think of a way." To believe that the prayer for divine guidance will be answered inspires the individual with a confidence that banishes all fear and worry and other mental states which obscure a dis-

¹*Amer. Jour. Psych.*, Vol. x, p. 503.

passionate view of a difficulty and inhibit any effort to overcome it. The expectation of the co-operation of a mighty helper tends to construct a personality both physically and intellectually competent to do what one asks God to accomplish in a mysterious way for him. "If we may take seriously (and I suppose

Mental Poise Through Prayer

we may) the Rev. W. A. Sunday's account of his first ball game after his conversion, prayer played a considerable part in his success. A difficult fly came to him in the field at a very critical point in the game * * * 'It was up

to me. I turned and ran with all my might and said, O God! If you ever helped a mortal man in your life, help me get that ball, and you haven't much time to decide. I looked over my shoulder and saw the ball near—I shot out my left hand, and the ball struck and stuck.'"¹ Perhaps the answer to this prayer was a release from hindering tendencies, a deliverance giving him an opportunity to answer his own petition by taking advantage of effective motor control.

As an example of subconscious activity exploded into consciousness with the force of a vision, the following case is interesting: A lady who lives in the West relates that a few years ago she received a telegram stating that her mother who resided in the East was critically ill and that recovery was extremely doubtful. Strange to say, she could arrive at no definite decision whether to remain at home or to hasten to her mother's sick-bed. On the one hand, she had to consider that at that time she was entertaining friends, that she was burdened

Prayer Inducing a Revelation

with many household duties, and that she could hardly afford to make the expensive journey to the East. On the other hand, the natural impulse of a daughter to nurse her mother in her last sickness seemed almost irresistible. Torn asunder by conflicting thoughts, she made her perplexity an object of prayer, believing that her plea for

¹J. B. Pratt, *Amer. Jour. Relig. Psych.*, Vol. iv, p. 58.

divine guidance would be answered. A few days later while washing dishes and occupying her mind with matters foreign to prayer, it became clear to her in a vivid flash of insight that it was her duty to remain at home, entertaining her guests, caring for her household, and saving her money. She rested content in the thought that near relatives in the East would give her mother the best of care. The problem solved, she regained her poise. It is evident that this prayer is describable in terms of auto-suggestion, for we see in it a narrowing of the field of consciousness, a period of subconscious incubation, a sudden report of the subconscious when an attitude of passivity was assumed.

The following experience is analogous: "When at school, I was fond of trying my hand at geometrical problems. One baffled me. I often returned to it, in fact kept by me an elaborate figure. Some years after, and when the problem had not been touched by me for some time, I had been sitting up till the small hours, deciphering a cryptograph for one of my pupils. Exulting in the successful solution, I turned into bed; and suddenly there flashed across my mind the secret of the solution of the problem I had so long vainly dealt with, this secret being a slight addition to my elaborate figure. The effect on me was strange. I trembled, as if in the presence of another being who had communicated the secret to me."¹

Subconscious Solution of a Geometrical Problem

Sometimes the answer to the prayer for divine guidance is in the form of visions and voices, and other hallucinations. A friend relates that his young child was sick unto death and that the physician had pronounced the case hopeless. In his deep distress the father prayed that the life of the child be spared. One can imagine the despair and mental depression of the parent. One morning when he was shoveling coal into the furnace in basement of the house, he heard a voice saying, "Fear not!" These words comforted him immeasurably.

Hallucinations in Prayer

¹W. B. Carpenter, *Mental Physiology*, p. 536.

The case bears the essentials of auto-suggestion. No doubt the subconscious responded in terms of an auditory experience to the attention to the prayer and the one-sided mental activity.

An analogous case is the experience of Socrates and his Daimon. It will be recalled that throughout his entire life he was on certain occasions conscious of a voice, a divine sign, which he called his Daimon. "It assumed for him from the beginning

The Daimon of Socrates

the appearance of a foreign influence, a higher revelation, an oracle."¹ It exercised a restraining and negative influence, for it did not manifest itself when an apparently proper course of action was being pursued. To hold in mental focus an idea of ethical content was characteristic of him; he was known to have been absorbed in contemplation all day long. "What distinguished Socrates in his general conduct from his fellow-citizens was his power of inward concentration."² His absolute confidence in the reliability of the Daimon was in reality the casting of himself upon a deeper-lying self, in response to which there rushed up from the currents of the subconscious ethical insight in terms of an auditory experience.

Perhaps the form of the hallucination is largely determined by the type or types of mental imagery predominating in the individual. Doubtless both the person who was comforted by the words "fear not" and Socrates were ear-minded, and hence an auditory hallucination. Where the visual type of mental

Types of Mental Imagery and Temperament in Hallucinations

imagery is more prominent than any other, it is to be expected that the answer to the prayer for help and comfort in a trying situation, coming in the form of a hallucination, will be a vision. Where both the visual and the auditory types are found together in the same person, the hallucination is likely to be influenced by both. St. Paul on his way to Damascus saw a

¹E. Zeller, *Socrates and the Socratic School*, p. 95.

²Ibid., p. 97.

vision and heard a voice. In this connection it is well to note that Professor Coe in an inductive study of the influence of temperament in religion, finds that those who have hallucinations in connection with their religious life are subject to them in other respects. Where there is a predisposition to hallucination in general there are likely to be hallucinations in the religious life. One is tempted to infer that the hallucinations coming in response to prayer and those experienced in general are at bottom of a piece. This is, however, not the place to offer an extended description of hallucination, but merely to point out that the sanguine and meloncholic temperaments accompanied as they are by an abundance of emotion and a high degree of suggestibility have a decided tendency to hallucinations both religious and non-religious.¹ Where favorable temperamental conditions, concentration of the attention upon certain groups of ideas, and expectation obtain, the hallucination is usually forthcoming.²

Before bringing the discussion of this class of prayers to a close it will be necessary to take into serious account so-called objective answers to prayer. Many well-intentioned persons maintain that they obtain answers to prayer for things over which man has no control. The writer must confess that he has yet to find a case of this kind which can stand a scientific test. Lapse of memory, unintentional exaggeration, coincidence, the fallacy of accommodating and adapting a prayer to some event which resembles the answer desired, are some of the factors which account for what is interpreted as an objective answer.

**Objective
Answers**

The average man is a notoriously incompetent observer in all fields other than those in which he has been trained. When the critical faculties are held in abeyance, bias and prejudice, expectation and preconception, gain the upper hand, and the sources of error are ignored. The frequent coincidences, which lead many to believe that objective answers to prayer are obtained, are doubtless the result of interest and ex-

¹See G. A. Coe, *The Spiritual Life*, p. 104 ff.

²See E. Parish, *Hallucinations and Illusions*.

pectation. The tendency is to invest coincidental experiences with power to influence belief and conduct. "It is only necessary to become deeply interested in coincidences, to look about with eyes open and eager to detect them, in order to discover them on all sides; resolve to record all that come to hand, and they seem to multiply until you can regard yourself and your friends as providentially favored in this direction."¹ The following may serve as an example of so-called objective answers to prayer:

Mr. H. C. Trumbull relates that when he was superintendent of a mission school he and his teachers determined to take a sleigh-ride on Christmas morning to the state prison, where they proposed to conduct religious services and visit a former pupil who was incarcerated for arson. In the course of a meeting called to make the necessary arrangements a teacher suggested that possibly there would be no snow-fall on or before Christmas and in that case all plans would come to naught. Their leader, Mr. Trumbull, ventured to say that since they were in God's special service and had renewedly prayed for guidance in their plans, they might with perfect confidence trust God to do his part. Returning home from the meeting, he realized the delicacy of the position he had taken, and fell upon his knees to ask for help and guidance. On Christmas eve he met his teachers to complete all details and, although the sky was star-lit and there was no indication that snow would cover the bare earth, they separated for the night with the agreement to meet the following morning. On Christmas morning four inches of snow covered the ground and supplied an excellent basis for sleighing. The proposed sleigh-ride was now a possibility, and all plans were carried out to the letter. The teachers were convinced that God had sent the snow in answer to their prayers.² It may seem ungracious to raise the following

A So-called Objective Answer

¹J. Jastrow, *Fact and Fable in Psychology*, p. 90.

²*Illustrative Answers to Prayer*, p. 11 ff.

questions: Was the snowfall contingent upon the teachers' trust in God, or would it have come even if they had not prayed? Was there in reality no sign of the coming snow on Christmas eve, or might a meteorologist have detected atmospheric conditions presaging it? Was the incident an objective answer to prayer, or a happy coincidence? The writer feels no hesitancy in declaring for the latter.

That answers to personal petitional prayer are subconscious phenomena is a conclusion one feels compelled to arrive at by way of the evidence cited above. Every answer has its parallel in some form of response to a suggested idea. Although the moral issues involved in the conversion of a Christian are infinitely higher than those involved in the conversion of a Buddha or a Sioux Indian boy, the same psychological principles underlie

all the varieties of conversion. Each phase of conversion has its analogy in certain mental states not generally regarded as specifically religious. The breaking of a bad habit through prayer

Summary

is duplicated by the elimination of evil through hypnotic suggestion. Divine healing and mental therapeutics are one in their essential characteristics. Prayers for guidance are paralleled by the subconscious solution of various kinds of problems. The subconscious results of prayer range from the inhibition of mental states unfavorable to an adjustment, to a re-birth of the self. The conclusion that there is an objective answer to prayer in the sense of a direct interference with natural law is based on invalid evidence.

CHAPTER V

THE ANSWER TO PRAYER—*Continued*

As we have observed elsewhere petitional prayers may be divided into two large classes—those which are answered through the activity of the life-forces resident within the praying personality, and those which are answered by influencing another self. Thus far we have studied the answers which come through the praying self. The present task is to examine

Prayers Answered Through Another Self

the large group of private prayers which depend upon a co-operating self for their answers. A private prayer, as we shall directly see, may become a social suggestion passing through a series of mental elaborations in the direction of the answer. Any prayer which may be answered through the self with which it is original, may also be answered through a co-operating self. Answers to the private prayers for the conversion of others, for the elimination of the evils of others, for the cure of the diseases of others, for guidance of others in trying situations, are common. Such prayers are altruistic and intercessory. Many other prayers answered in response to an appeal to another individual are intended for self-expansion, for personal ends. Social suggestion is the key to the psychological interpretation of all prayers involving the concurrent activities of two or more selves, regardless of whether the prayers have their source in self-regard or altruism.

As an example of this class of prayer let us examine the case of a superintendent of a Junior League, who engaged in private prayer to ask for teachers to instruct the children under her religious supervision. When she arose from her knees she was convinced that if she went into the street helpers would be found and her prayer be answered. She obeyed the impulse, but failed to enlist any one in the streets. She then felt moved to enter a home where she expected to present the need of the Junior League

to a young woman with whom she was acquainted. When she was informed that her friend was not at home, she requested the mother to interest her daughter in the matter. The mother reluctantly consented to inform her daughter of the call for volunteer teachers, insisting that the young woman was interested in too many other things to assume the responsibilities of imparting religious instruction to children. Entering another home, the superintendent was doomed to a second disappointment. The woman solicited refused her services on the ground of pressing social engagements. The superintendent returned home in a confused state of mind, for she had confidently expected a readier response to her appeal

A Case of Prayer as Social Suggestion

and the consequent answer to her prayer. She was, however, agreeably surprised when after a few weeks both young women reported for work as teachers in the Junior League. This prayer experience is not essentially different from the normal process of social suggestion influencing the individual in his daily life. When others were approached with the need, the prayer became a social suggestion. It is of interest to note that in the one case the interest of two other selves were aroused. The request was lodged in the mind of one young woman through the medium of the mother who informed her daughter of the call for volunteer teachers. In the other case the need was introduced into consciousness by the superintendent herself. The indirect and the direct appeals passed through a period of growth, largely subconscious, and issued in the personal response and active interest.

Thus prayers for things within the gift of others, such as store and time, are answered by letting others know of the need. The answer depends largely upon the willingness of others to respond, upon the suggestibility and liberality of others. A widely quoted illustration of the power of prayer to move others

to contribute of their resources to benevolent causes, is the experience of George Mueller, who for many years conducted an orphanage, depending solely upon answers to prayer to supply the necessary funds. His simple trust in the efficacy of prayer, his irreproachable character, the nature of the benevolent cause he represented, the fact that it was generally known that the orphanage was dependent upon the generosity of the public for its support,—all of these factors made their own irresistible appeal to the friends of the institution. It would be difficult to imagine circumstances more favorable for arousing the social sympathies.¹

Prayers of intercession are answered in much the same way as are those for money or service. Prayers in behalf of others tend to become social suggestions realizing themselves when the persons prayed for are in touch with the intercession and respond. This type of prayer tends to beget prayer. The intercession may pass through considerable mental modification and then give rise to personal prayers for regeneration, purity of life and other religious interests. It has been implied that a primary condition of the answering of this type of prayer is that the person for whom intercession is made have at least an inkling of the petitions offered in his

The Prayer of Intercession

behalf. The influence of early religious surroundings, the knowledge that somebody is praying for him, cannot fail to color the life of the person. The late Jerry McCauley, for years the superintendent of the Bowery Mission of New York City, is reported to have said, "I never yet knew a man to be permanently reclaimed who did not have a good mother."² A Methodist layman in a letter to his son, who is preparing himself for the ministry, says, "You are our first-born, and in a tender mo-

¹See George Mueller, *The Life of Trust*.

²Cited in F. W. Davenport, *Primitive Traits in Religious Revivals*, p. 310.

ment we dedicated you to the ministry in the church in which your mother was raised and at whose altars I was converted. * * * Your mother and I, before you were an hour old, prayed that God would choose you to be one of his ministers. You know that we have not forced you to enter the ministry, or even urged you."¹ The prayer of dedication, followed, as it certainly was, by numberless intercessions, doubtless built itself into the son's character and was influential in turning him toward the ministry.

It may be urged, and rightly so, that, whereas in this discussion and the illustrations used there has been more or less blending of public and private prayer and utilizing of the ordinary channels of communication, countless secret prayers have been answered without the conscious knowledge of such on the part of the persons whose co-operation was involved. Without

Prayer and Subconscious Perception

pausing to refer some so-called answers to misinterpretations discussed in the previous chapters, it may be pointed out that while the co-operating person may be wholly unaware of receiving any tidings of the prayer, the subconscious may take note of impressions imperceptible to consciousness. The range of our mental life is far more extensive than the psychic experience of which we are aware. It has been repeatedly demonstrated that we are influenced by a multitude of subconscious impressions of which we are ignorant. It may be well to refer to a number of experiments which have revealed the presence of subconscious perceptions.

Experimentation in hypnotism frequently discloses mental impressions of which the subject was unaware. "Several friends,"

¹Robert Allen, *Letters of an Old Methodist to His Son in the Ministry*, p. 16.

writes Max Dessoir, "were in my room, one of whom, Mr. W., was reading to himself, while the rest of us were talking with one another. Some one happening to mention the name of Mr. X., in whom Mr. W. is much interested, Mr. W. raised his head and asked, 'What was that about Mr. X.?' He knew nothing, he told us, about our previous conversation; he had only heard the familiar name, as often happens. I then hypnotized him, with his consent, and when he was pretty deeply entranced I asked him again as to the conversation. To our great astonishment, he now repeated to us the substance of our whole conversation during the time he was reading to himself."¹

**Subconscious
Impressions
Revealed by
Hypnotism**

Many experiments, of which the following is an example, have revealed the fact that our judgments are influenced by factors imperceptible to the waking consciousness. "Two illuminated surfaces were compared when the intensity of the illumination differed by a very slight yet measurable amount, the subject being required to state which surface was the brighter. The difference was so slight that it could not be recognized, and the subject was therefore compelled to 'guess.' The result of 'guessing' showed that the brighter was correctly designated with a frequency so great that the unrecognized difference was clearly effective in determining the choice. The observations have shown that differences too small to be discriminated may still influence our reactions, and it is thus seen that among effective stimuli there must also be included those which we do not recognize."²

**Judgment
Influenced by
Unrecognizable
Stimuli**

Experimental investigation in involuntary whispering has brought out the fact that whenever we think there is an initial

¹Cited in Boris Sidis, *Psychology of Suggestion*, p. 152.

²Donaldson, *The Growth of the Brain*, p. 292.

and incipient movement of the vocal mechanism appropriate to the utterance of the thought, which although inaudible to the waking consciousness of another may be subconsciously perceived. Two experimenters in telepathy, F. C. Hanson and A. Lehmann, were seated with backs toward each other. Numbers from 10 to 99 were taken out of a bag in haphazard manner and held in mind by one of the experimenters. The part of the other was to state what number was being held in mind. It was soon noticed that when a number was thought of for some time there was a decided tendency on the part of the vocal muscles to inervate. Caution was exercised to keep the mouth closed. A bystander insisted that he heard no sound. An examination of the results shows that chance does not account for the proportion of correct responses. Doubtless the transference of the ideas of number occurred through the sense of hearing, the involuntary whispering being subconsciously registered by the agent.¹ Subsequent experiments confirm this conclusion. Mr. H. S. Curtis conducted experiments which recorded automatic movements of the larynx when the Lord's Prayer was mentally recited.² That thought is generally, if not always, accompanied by a jiggling of the larynx, indicating incipient whispering which the subconscious of another may record, seems to be well established.

Space does not permit a description of the experiments which reveal our ignorance of the presence of organic reactions to slight stimuli, such as the afflux of blood to the brain during mental effort, and of the automatic movements of the hands, head and body in the direction of the attention.³ Enough has been said to sustain the contention that our feelings, thoughts and actions are modified by our responses to stimuli too slight to be

¹See W. Wundt, *Philosophische Studien*, Vol. xi., part 4.

²*Amer. Jour. Psych.* Vol. xi., p. 2.

³See J. Jastrow, *A Study of Involuntary Movements*, in *Fact and Fable in Psychology*, p. 307.

consciously recognized. The range of the sensibility of the subconscious is not co-extensive with that of the waking consciousness. A private prayer may make impressions too faint or indistinct to

Prayer

Involuntarily

Transferred

attract the attention of another and yet be subconsciously perceived. Neither the person making the prayer nor the one answering it may be aware of the delicate process of subconscious sense-perception, or hyperaesthesia, and therefore neither is able to account for the reaction in terms of an orderly sequence. When the transmitter is not conscious that the receiver has perhaps subconsciously taken note of the unintended signals of the prayer, there is a natural tendency to ascribe the answering of it to the miraculous intervention of God. A handshake, a gesture, facial expressions, inadvertent hints, impressions carried between the lines of a letter, and many other factors unrecognized by the waking consciousness, indicate one's interest in the religious welfare of another. Doubtless some persons are more sensitive to weak stimuli than others, and some are constantly betraying more of their inner states than others. When we add to unconscious preception the many other means of giving and taking hints of prayers intended to influence others, the sources of information seem legion. Taking a hint from A., B. may inform C. that he is mentioned in the prayers of D., or is an object of D.'s solicitude. The pathway that a private prayer may take to reach the person it is intended to touch may be labyrinthian, and we may not be able to predict how, when, or where it will travel, yet we may rest assured that unless it somehow does arrive at its proper destination it will be unanswered.

What has been urged in another connection regarding lack of precise observation, unconscious exaggeration, coincidence and their effect on an interpretation of answer to prayer should receive a fresh emphasis and application at this juncture. As an example of how a lack of knowledge of mental behavior leads to misinterpretations of prayer, an incident or two recorded

by Mr. H. C. Trumbull may be instructive. He writes that one day his friend and helper, Mr. John Wattles, came to his home and discovered that he had lost a gold sleeve-button during an absence of several hours in Hartford. At the suggestion of Mr. Trumbull, he retraced his steps, looking for the missing article wherever he had been since he had last noticed it. While writing in his study after the departure of his friend, Mr. Trumbull was very much disquieted because he had sent the young man upon his mission without so much as even suggesting to him that he should pray for God's guidance. In deep contrition Mr. Trumbull fell upon his knees and prayed for forgiveness and the success of his friend. When Mr. Wattles returned he reported success. He stated that he had reached the house again without finding the sleeve-button and was about to open the door when he was prompted to halt and look back. Obeying the impulse, he found the lost article lying upon the very door-step. When Mr. Trumbull related his prayer experience, both were convinced that the lost object was located through prayer.¹ On closer investigation it must be confessed that the prayer played no part whatsoever in the finding of the sleeve-button. The prompting to halt and look back upon the door-step need not be regarded as an impression direct from God in answer to prayer, but may be interpreted in terms of subconscious activity of Mr. Wattles himself. Perhaps his attention was fixed upon business affairs, and therefore the dropping of the sleeve-button from the sleeve to the door-step was but dimly and subconsciously noted. When the search for it was relinquished, the subconscious impression became potent enough to induce hesitancy and the impulse to look in the direction of the lost article. Or, to suggest another possibility, arriving at the home of his friend after his futile efforts in the city, Mr. Wattles may have preceived the sleeve-button out

¹H. C. Trumbull, *Illustrative Answers to Prayers*, p. 75 ff.

of the "tail of his eye," and the preception, although in the fringe of consciousness, may have been definite enough to arouse the action resulting in the end of the search. Whatever the incidental steps may have been which led to the recovery of the article, it is quite clear that it would have been found through the same process of consciousness, even if no prayer for guidance had been made by the friend of the seeker. Instances of finding lost or mislaid articles in much the same way, even when no prayer for the success of the search is made, are too numerous to mention.

The same writer gives a psychologically similar incident reported by a college president's wife. The president's residence was situated in a secluded spot quite apart from the travelled highway. During his absence his wife was one night awakened by hearing a burglar forcing an entrance into the house. She knew that a policeman visited the grounds at certain hours of the night; hence her prayer, "Lord, send a policeman to our rescue." Just then she heard the report of a pistol. The startled woman sprang to the window and by the light of the moon saw signs of a struggle. In a moment a policeman appeared before the house and asked to be admitted in order that he might see what harm the burglar had done. Gaining admittance, he told his story. He had made the usual visit in the vicinity, finding

**A
Similar
Case**

that all was well. While he was on his way to the road, something told him to retrace his steps and investigate. Going back to the president's home, he saw a burglar entering a window. Pistol-shots were exchanged. The burglar fled to the river which was only a short distance from the house, and attempted to escape in a small boat, but was disabled and drowned. The coming of the policeman at the opportune time was regarded as the answer to the prayer made by the president's wife.¹ It is needless to say that the elements of subconscious perception

¹*Ibid*, p. 137 ff.

are prominent in this episode. The fact that the policeman was troubled in mind, and therefore returned to the house, throws light upon the subject. Doubtless his first visit was accompanied by a subconscious registration of unrecognizable impressions—minute evidence of the presence of a burglar. It was the subconscious prompting of impressions that the self had been taught by experience to associate with the presence of burglars that sent him to the rescue. He would have arrived even if prayer had been omitted. A premonition ascribed to the sixth sense is an analogy. The sixth sense is subconscious sensibility and elaboration.

We have seen that genuine answers to prayers involving the co-operation of others are dependent upon the transmission of some message of the prayers through the normal means of communication, its conscious or subconscious reception, and the suggestibility of the receiver. One is tempted to go a step farther. There are cases on record of the efficacy of the mere belief that intercession was made when in reality no prayer for another was offered. "In South Chicago a lady had a serious

case of heart trouble. The physicians told her that the case was probably hopeless. She then sent her husband to see the Christian Science doctor. The healer told the husband that he could heal her by absent treatment, and that if he should go home and select an hour

The Effect of Mere Faith in Intercessions

he would pray and she must pray, and only think of being healed. He also informed the husband that the wife must dress loosely and be very quiet. His wife selected 8 P. M. the next day. The husband was a travelling man, and the next morning started to tell the healer to treat his wife at 8 P. M., but found he could not stop off and make the train he wanted. He did not see the healer. That night the wife robed herself, and meditated upon being healed. Of course, she thought the doctor was praying for her, but he knew nothing about it, but that did not matter. The next day she wrote her husband that she was much improved. The third day she arose, dressed

and went about her work. The fourth day she wrote to her husband at Aurora: 'I am well.'"¹ Her belief, although unwarranted, that the healer was praying for her tended to realize the idea of health. When her husband returned home again he could contain himself no longer and at once disabused her mind of the belief that the curist had prayed for her recovery. The sudden revelation was more than she was able at that time to bear; she suffered a relapse and expired within ten hours. Despite its unfortunate ending, the case is instructive in that it shows the power of faith in the prayers of another, even when that faith is without objective ground.

Parenthetically it may be remarked that doubtless many persons are converted, delivered from all manner of pernicious evils, cured of functional diseases and helped in others, and guided out of perplexities, because they are convinced that they are mentioned in the prayers of others whom they respect, even when no intercession is made. The report of another's prayerful

interest in one may be false; our sources of information are not always absolutely reliable. While we do know more than we consciously know, hear more than we consciously hear, see more than we consciously see, it is nevertheless true that judgments based

A Source of Error in Judgment

upon subconscious impressions are not infallible. One may waken in the dead of the night, fully persuaded that an intruder has found his way into the house. The subconscious may have taken note of data too delicate to be perceptible to consciousness, and the conclusion is drawn that a burglar in the house is stealthily seeking loot. The real cause of the disquieting experience may be a timid mouse nibbling a dry cracker in the pantry. How many of our premonitions has time proved to be groundless!

Prayers for the dead are regarded by some as a legitimate form of intercession. One writer of devotional literature makes

¹J. V. Coombs, *Religious Delusions*, p. 142.

the following plea for them: "And the blessed dead!—those happy souls 'who have departed thence in the Lord!' They, too, come within the limitless range of intercessory prayer. May

**Prayers
for the
Dead**

we pray for them? Three words will help us to answer the question: law, love and liberty. Law allows it; love commands it; liberty embraces it."¹ There is of course no valid evidence for believing that the prayers of the living influence the dead. Only a few protestant denominations teach the duty and efficacy of praying for the dead. It would, however, be rash to declare that this form of intercession is without any effect. The result, so far as can be determined, is reflexive. Such prayers tend to deepen the social sympathies. Since the altruistic sentiments grow beneath the threshold of consciousness, the subjective influence of the prayer is largely in terms of subconscious products.

No doubt some who are reading these pages have been expecting a reference to telepathy, or thought-transference without the channels of sense-perception, as a means of influencing others at a distance. Briefly stated, this theory maintains that

Telepathy

one can read the thoughts of another at a distance and control them, perceive physical phenomena occurring no matter how far removed from the percipient, see into the future, communicate with the dead, and do many other wonderful things. The writer is frank to say that he is forced to reject the evidence for telepathic marvels as scientifically untenable. Such competent students of borderland psychology as Muensterberg, Jastrow, Parish, and others, reduce the so-called telepathic occurrences to a hopeless jumble of suggestion, unconscious perception, chance, coincidence, hallucinations, illusions, defective observation, expectation, imagination, exaggeration and deliberate, or unintentional,

¹E. E. Holmes, *Prayer and Action*, p. 51.

fraud. These scientists insist that an unbroken chain of sensations intermediates every perception. Professor Muensterberg describes the following typical case of alleged telepathic influence:

“There came to me, late at night, a stranger, in wildest despair, resolved to commit suicide that night if I could not help him. He had been a physician, but had given up his practice because his brother on the other side of the ocean, hated him and had him under his telepathic influence, troubling him from over the sea with voices which mocked him and with impulses to foolish actions. He had not slept nor eaten anything for several days, and the only chance for life he saw was that a new hypnotic influence might overpower the mystical hypnotic

forces. I soon found the source of his trouble. In treating himself for a wound he had misused cocaine in an absurd way, and the hallucination of voices was the chief symptom of his cocaineism. These products of his poisoned brain had sometimes reference

A Case of So-Called Telepathic Influence

to his brother in Europe, and thus the telepathic idea grew in him and permeated his whole life. I hypnotized him, and suggested to him with success to have sleep and food and a smaller dose of cocaine. Then I hypnotized him daily for six weeks. After ten days he gave up cocaine entirely, after three weeks the voices disappeared, and after that the other symptoms faded away. It was not, however, until the end that the telepathic theory was exploded. Even when the voices were gone, he felt for a while that his movements were controlled from over the ocean; and after six weeks when I had made him quite well again, he laughed over his telepathic absurdities, but assured me that if these sensations came back again he would be unable, even in full health, to resist the mystical interpretation, so vividly had he felt the distant influences.”¹

¹*Psychology and Life*, p. 242 ff.

The writer emphatically reiterates that he cannot accept as valid the findings of those, be they ever so sincere, who declare that the doctrine of telepathy is the only explanation of certain cases of thought-transmission. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that whether one has recourse to a method of thought-transference without the ordinary means of communication, or is persuaded that without the interruption of the usual series of sensations consciously or subconsciously perceived the person to be influenced by a prayer cannot be reached, the contention here maintained is granted—the contention that in order to be truly effective the plea or intercession must find its way into the mind of another. The prayer thus introduced into the life of another acts as a social suggestion, the prominence accorded the prayer depending upon the suggestibility of the person for its object, the answer ranging all the way from the granting of a mere trifle to conversion.

We are now prepared to appreciate the important part which auto-suggestion plays in private prayer. We have observed how prayer attracts and holds the attention. We have seen that the isolation of the person, suspension of vision, posture, automatic motor phenomena of mental effort, fasting, oral repetition, emotion, voluntary attention and other factors conspire to fix in mind the prayer. The importance of the faith state has been emphasized. Devotional literature, the testimony of others, the recollection of personal experiences, the misinterpretation of unanswered prayers or the ignoring of the same, the acceptance of coincidental cases, the repetition of the prayer, are some of the elements which arouse and increase faith. Attention is selective in its nature, and the narrowing of the field of consciousness to a certain group of ideas embodied in a prayer determines just which ideas among the many possible ones shall be prominent

**Prayer
as Social
Suggestion**

Summary

in the mind. Faith at first consciously or unconsciously strives toward the realization of the prayer held in mind, and then becomes passive in order that the subconscious element may come to completion. The prayer held in mental focus and believed in tends to realize itself automatically. That the answers to prayer are due to the interaction of conscious and subconscious factors, the analogies taken from departments of life which usually receive no religious recognition seem to indicate. Plainly all answers to prayer are of the same general nature as their analogies. The element of auto-suggestion is perhaps more pronounced in the prayers answered through the self than in those answered through another self. The prayers of the self for regeneration, elimination of evil, purity of life, cure of disease, help in a predicament, bristle with the essentials of auto-suggestion. In prayers that look toward the co-operation of others, auto-suggestion tends to construct a personality radiant with faith and confidence which increase the effectiveness of the social suggestion upon which the answer depends. It would be folly to say that prayer is nothing more than suggestion. Prayer is indeed more than a mere mental impression which tends to express itself through the automatic processes of the personality. It is suggestion plus a religious attitude. Prayer clothes the skeleton of suggestion with the warm flesh of religious sanction. Suggestion is swallowed up in prayer. It would immeasurably enrich the personal life if the religious interpretation were extended to all the phenomena of suggestion which in any way minister to the needs of man.

CHAPTER VI

DEVOTIONAL PRAYER

The majority of the best religionists of our day aver that prayer is infinitely more than petition for special favors, that the true prayer is devotional rather than petitional. They

Devotional Prayer

regard prayer as a reverential attitude, a mode of self-expression, meditation on life's deepest problems, communion with the Invisible. To them prayer is an end in itself and not so much a means to an end. This kind of prayer we shall call devotional. It embraces the

prayers of confession, adoration, worship and thanksgiving.

Haunted by a sense of guilt and regret, the person may seek and find relief in the prayer of confession. Convinced that God will lend a sympathetic ear, he freely confesses in prayer what he withholds from his most intimate human friend. The confession is followed by a sense of unity with his maker.

The Prayer of Confession

The benefits of this type of prayer are set forth with characteristic vividness by Brother Lawrence in the following description: "I consider myself as the most wretched of men, full of sores and corruption, and who has committed all sorts of crimes against the King.

Touched with a sensible regret, I ask forgiveness, I abandon myself in His hands that He may do what He pleases with me. The King, full of mercy and goodness, very far from chastising me, embraces me with love, makes me eat at His table, serves me with His own hands, gives me the key of His treasures; He converses and delights Himself with me incessantly, in a thousand and a thousand ways, and treats me in all respects as His favorite."¹

¹*The Practice of the Presence of God*, p. 25.

For countless ages man has experienced relief through confession in various forms. Religious leaders recommend confession to God, the pastor, or friend. Pent-up emotions escape through vocal expression; grief exhausts itself in cries and tears. Family quarrels which do not originate in a controversy concerning the fundamentals tend to clear the domestic atmosphere. Some persons discharge their wrath and indignation against a correspondent in a violent letter which is consigned to the waste-basket when it is written. Criminals at large, crushed by the weight of unconfessed crimes, occasionally surrender themselves to the police, preferring the sentence of the court to the qualms of conscience. Although confession has unbur-

**Psychoanalysis
in
Confession**

dened the mind of man for many centuries, the psychology of it has been obscure until Dr. S. Freud and his co-workers contributed their theory and practice of psychoanalysis. In his lectures on Psychoanalysis Dr. Freud throws light on the prayer of confession. A careful study of hysteria convinced him that its cause is a half-suppressed wish repugnant to the moral ideals of the patient. The wish lingers in the subconscious, but as often as it tends to come to consciousness it is repressed. To converse freely about the root of the disturbance relieves the patient; therefore, the physician encourages him to confess whatever is lurking in the mind, be it ever so trivial or embarrassing. An irrelevant statement or phrase may betray the wish which the patient is trying to suppress. If the desired information is not given during the conversation with the physician, it may be obtained through hypnosis.¹

Dr. Freud cites the following case as an illustration of the principles involved in psychoanalysis: "It is that of a young girl, who was deeply attached to her father, who died a short time before, and in whose care she had shared * * *

¹*American Journal of Psychology*, Vol. xxi, p. 181 ff.

When her older sister married, she grew to feel a peculiar sympathy for her new brother-in-law, which easily passed with her for family tenderness. The sister soon fell ill and died, while the patient and her mother were away. The absent ones were hastily recalled, without being fully told of the painful situation. As the girl stood by the bedside of her dead sister, for one short moment there

**Freud's
Theory
Illustrated**

surged up in her mind an idea, which might be framed in these words: 'Now he is free and I can marry him.' We may be sure that this idea, which betrayed to her consciousness her intense love for her brother-in-law, of which she had not been conscious, was the next moment consigned to repression by her revolted feelings. The girl fell ill with severe hysterical symptoms, and, when I came to treat the case, it appeared that she had entirely forgotten that scene at her sister's bedside and the unnatural egoistic desire which had arisen in her. She remembered it during the treatment, reproduced the pathogenic moment with every sign of intense excitement, and was cured by this treatment."²

Freud contends that an impulse freed from repression can in no wise prove subversive to the moral attribute. In fact, the wish exerts a far more pernicious influence when it is subconscious and therefore not amenable to control than when it is conscious and therefore acted upon by tendencies which destroy its power. As soon as it is set free, many an impulse is consumed by the moral sense. In other cases the liberated wish cannot be wholly condemned, but may be refined and regulated and discharged through higher channels. In still other cases the legitimacy of the freed impulse may be frankly admitted. The confession of the young girl cured by Dr. Freud purged the

**Disposition
of the
Freed Wish**

²*Ibid.*, pp. 193-194.

personality of the noxious element at once. It is thinkable that she might have been led to express her love for her brother-in-law in the kindly deeds of social service. Under still other circumstances, perhaps she might have found her love legitimate and abandoned herself to it.

Dr. Freud's theory of psychoanalysis seems to hark back to Aristotle's conception of the function of tragedy, and to be an elaboration of his doctrine of *katharsis*. The great philosopher defined tragedy as follows: "Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper *katharsis*, or purgation, of these emotions."¹ We are here concerned with his theory of *katharsis*. While the meaning of *katharsis* has baffled many of Aristotle's interpreters, the following exposition is illuminating: "In the medical language of the school of Hippocrates it (*katharsis*) strictly denotes the removal of a painful or disturbing element from the organism, and hence the purifying of what remains, by the elimination of alien matter. Applying this to tragedy we observe that the feelings of pity and fear in real life contain a morbid and disturbing element. In the process of tragic excitation they find relief, and the morbid element is thrown off. As the tragic action progresses, when the tumult of the mind, first roused, has afterwards subsided, the lower forms of emotion are found to have been transmuted into higher and more refined forms. The painful element in the pity and fear of reality is purged away; the emotions themselves are purged."²

¹Translated by S. H. Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, p. 240.

²*Ibid.*, pp. 253-254.

Now the prayer of confession may be described in terms of psychoanalysis. It also is a kind of *katharsis* which expels disquieting elements from the personality. An unforgiven and unconfessed moral lapse, secret temptation, questionable and haunting desires may create a disturbance when they are refused admittance no matter how persistently they may be knocking on the door of consciousness. Finally, the individual may unburden himself in the prayer of confession.

**Psychoanalysis
in Confession
Through Prayer**

Convinced that God is all compassion, he withholds nothing that oppresses him. One confession blazes the way for another until the disturbing idea has been confessed. The impulse which is now allowed to represent itself above the threshold of consciousness may stand convicted before the tribunal of conscience and be sentenced to die at once, or the culprit before the bar of justice may be declared innocent and be permitted to run at large, or the offender may be neither wholly acquitted nor condemned, but be restrained and disciplined for higher ends. As an example of the possibilities of the outcome of the prayer of confession let us take three ways of disposing of the impression that the reproductive instinct is vile. One person may suffer the qualms of conscience because of illicit sexual relations. When the vice is acknowledged the moral life may be strong enough to purge the personality of it at once; or, if deeply ingrained, the evil may be overcome in accordance with the method by which bad habits are uprooted. Another may confess that he is ashamed of and humiliated by the very existence of sexual impulse. Viewing the matter in the light of the confession experience, the person may conclude that his attitude was due to a foolish prudery and that the reproductive life has a dignified place in the propagation of the race. Still another may confess that the reproductive instinct is too active, a condition repugnant to his moral ideals. The confession may lead him to the conclusion that the activity of the sex impulse is neither to be wholly excused nor condemned, but to be transmuted and modified. Wholesome relations with the

opposite sex, a personal interest in the welfare of children or of unfortunate humanity, or other uplifting and ennobling activities, afford the excessive prompting of the sex instinct higher and more refined avenues of expression. In this way the subconscious disturbance is granted conscious recognition and condemned, or excused, or transformed. The freed impulse is disposed of according to the sense of fitness which characterizes the religious instinct. In some cases the confession itself rids the self of the baneful element; in other cases the prayer life must carry on to completion the work of elimination, or transmutation before the person can feel entirely at one with the Universe.

The psychology of the prayer of praise is closely akin to that of the prayer of confession. Let a writer of devotional literature describe this type of prayer: "We may think of praise

The Prayer of Praise

in three parts—Adoration, Thanksgiving, Worship. Thus, we adore God for what He is; we thank Him for what He does; we worship Him for what he wills. Or, we adore Him as our Beloved; we thank Him as our Benefactor; we worship Him as our

Overlord."¹ Prayer as an expression of gratitude has found favor in the sight of many a religionist. St. Paul says, "With thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."² In Minna von Barnhelm, Lessing says, "A single grateful thought toward heaven is the most perfect prayer." One may feel a desire to adore or thank or worship God and disturb the harmony of consciousness by repressing the impulse. The mere obeying of the impulse is generally sufficient to restore the unity of consciousness.

Worship and adoration frequently pass beyond the mere freeing of a subconscious haunt and breed gentle hallucinations which are generally interpreted as the objective presence of God.

¹E. E. Holmes, *Prayer and Action*, p. 84.

²*Philippians* iv, 6.

The deeply rooted social nature of man may account for the practicing of the presence of God through worship and adoration.

Communion in Adoration and Worship

The desire to hold communion with God may be an outgrowth of man's instinct to fellowship with man.

If a man may converse with his fellows, why not with God as friend with friend? That worship and adoration

are often rewarded with a subjective

experience betraying the essentials of auto-suggestion, the following accounts of trustworthy persons will indicate: "I make the effort to feel the presence of God." "If I allow the cares of life to enter in and distract my thoughts, then this is not so." "The presence of God is felt in varying degrees according to the concentration of attention." The following statements reveal the intimacy and warmth of the experience and its interpretation: "I have attained a distinct feeling of the presence of God verging on the mystical sense." "Sometimes He has seemed inexpressively near—all-enveloping, etc." "Yes, some brooding spirit out of which my soul has sprung, and in the heart of which it must be held if my soul it satisfied." "I cannot imagine how religious persons can live satisfied without the practice of the presence of God. For my part, I keep myself retired with Him in the fund or center of my soul as much as I can; and while I am so with Him I fear nothing, but the least turning from Him is insupportable. * * * Let us live and die with God. Suffering will be sweet and pleasant to us while we are with Him; and the greatest pleasures will be, without Him, a cruel punishment to us."¹ Doubtless these persons experience hallucinations to which they do not ascribe religious significance. As observed elsewhere, hallucinations are a matter of temperament and predisposition.

Like the mystical experiences induced through the prayer of worship and adoration, the state of hallucination is character-

¹Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, pp. 32-34.

ized by a limitation of the field of consciousness, an obliviousness to surroundings, a heightened sensitivity, and a feeling of being controlled by another. The feeling of being under the direct control of a power not his own makes it difficult for the hallucinated subject to interpret his experience in terms of a mental projection. It is the nature of a fully exteriorized and objectified idea to assume spatial outwardness and to induce in the subject

The Consciousness of Being Controlled

a feeling of its own reality. The sense of a presence is, then, not peculiar to mystical religious states; it develops in hallucinations not interpreted theistically. Professor James gives the testimony of a lady who has the gift of automatic or involuntary writing. She says, "Whenever I practice automatic writing, what makes me feel that it is not due to a subconscious self is the feeling I always have of a foreign presence, external to my body. It is sometimes so definitely characterized that I could point to its exact position. This impression of presence is impossible to describe. It varies in intensity and clearness according to the personality from whom the writing professes to come. If it is some one whom I love, I feel it immediately, before any writing has come. My heart seems to recognize it."¹

Devotional prayer is characterized by a dissolving of an inward conflict, by a healing of a breach in consciousness, by a unifying of the self. The emphasis is laid on the experience itself rather than on the futherance of moral action. Many deeply religious people who have discarded petitional prayer find in devotional prayer a solace and inspiration which, they aver, more than offsets the loss of petitions for specific favors. It is evident that in devotional prayer auto-suggestion is not the prominent factor. This type of prayer lends itself to an interpretation

Summary

¹*The Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 62.

in terms of the principles of psychoanalysis. It has its roots in a mental unrest; a partially repressed subconscious impression is seeking conscious recognition. If the desire is persistently repulsed, a pathological disturbance may ensue. When the prayer of confession makes the discordant note the content of clear consciousness, conscience sits in judgment over the offender, condemning, exonerating, or recommending a process of refining. If the fault confessed is not deeply embedded and the moral constitution is vigorous enough, the evil tendency may at once be consumed in the intense feeling of repugnance which it arouses. In many instances the prayer of petition is relied upon to eliminate or modify the tendency which the confession has disclosed. Thus the devotional prayer may be the springs of petitional prayers, which, as we have seen, are desirable in terms of religiously sanctioned suggestion. What obtains in a more advanced and complicated form in the prayer of confession doubtless occurs in the prayer of praise. When the impulse to adore, worship, or thank God is discharged in the form of the prayer of praise, the equilibrium of the mind is restored. When the prayer of adoration and worship becomes a one-sided mental activity, the person may be hallucinated by the feeling of a divine presence which seems to be self-existent. This experience may be induced through auto-suggestion. The value of devotional prayer cannot easily be overestimated. It purges the self of its crass elements; it strikes harmony between the self and the not-self; it clarifies the ideals; it intensifies moral convictions; it imparts that touch of mysticism which separates the religious from the irreligious.

CHAPTER VII

UNANSWERED PRAYER

A popular writer makes no secret of the futility of many prayers when he says, "Probably it is accurate to say that thousands of prayers go up and bring nothing down. This is certainly true. Let us say it just as bluntly and plainly as it can be said."¹ Not all writers of devotional literature are as ready to admit the failures of the prayer life. It is a fact

Unanswered Prayers

that myriads of prayers are unanswered in the sense that the object of the petition is not forthcoming. Many and varied are the explanations made for the ungranted petition. We have elsewhere had occasion to refer to the fact that many attribute unanswered prayers to lack of faith, lack of definiteness, lack of perseverance, improper objects of prayer. Some insist that God hears all prayers, but answers only those which are in accord with his will and for the good of the petitioner. They affirm that "yes" is as real an answer as "no." Others maintain that every prayer is either directly or indirectly answered, that often the insignificant favor asked for is ungranted in order that a higher good may be bestowed. Our study of the part auto-suggestion plays in petitional prayer may perhaps afford us a vantage ground from which we may discover some reasons why so many prayers fail.

Some argue that many prayers are unanswered because they are on a low ethical plane. It is, however, fallacious to

¹S. D. Gordon, *Quiet Talks on Prayer*, p. 67

assume that the mere answering of a prayer is an infallible indication of its moral worth, for the laws of suggestion operate regardless of the ethical questions involved in religion. Other things being equal, the unethical petition is as likely to be granted as an ethical one. Too many prayers for questionable objects have been made and answered—prayers which have been productive of evil.

**Ethical
Discrimination**

But as religious insight deepens and the moral sentiment develops the person is in revolt against unethical discriminations in prayer. When life is guided by the highest elements of the soul prayer becomes a source of power which makes for righteousness. Ethical discrimination should, then, obtain, not because the answering of the prayer depends upon the moral quality of the petition, but because a worthy object of prayer contributes toward ideal ends. One must seek elsewhere for the causes of unanswered prayer.¹

Lack of discrimination against unscientific objects of prayer is one great source of unanswered prayers. An unscientific object of prayer is one which falls outside the sphere of mental influence or is too complex to be realized by the vitality of the organism. We have seen that answer to prayer is obtained

**Lack of
Scientific
Discrimination**

~~through the operation of the natural laws of our being; hence in order to be~~ effective petitional prayer must move within the scope of suggestion. It follows that the laws of prayer are not operative outside personal influence.

Instead of praying for rain we irrigate the arid region or modify its atmospheric condition by planting trees; instead of praying to be delivered from a plague of grasshoppers we plow under their larva and prevent their propagation; instead of praying for the arrest of the ravages of an

¹For a discussion of growth in ethical discrimination in prayer see A. L. Strong, *Psychology of Prayer*, p. 50.

epidemic of typhoid fever we test our drinking water and create sanitary conditions. The following incident, taken from a popular novel, may well arouse our suspicion: "Alessandro's grandfather had journeyed with Father Crespi as his servant, and many a miracle he had with his own eyes seen Father Crespi perform. There was a cup out of which the Father always took his chocolate for breakfast, a beautiful cup, which was carried in a box, the only luxury the Father had; and one morning it was broken, and everybody was in despair. 'Never mind, never mind,' said the Father; 'I will make it whole;' and taking the two pieces in his hands, he held them tight together, and prayed over them, and they became one solid piece again, and it was used through the journey, just as before."¹ The most that prayer can do for us in regard to conditions on which the mental life has no influence is to construct a personality competent to rise above the untoward circumstances. Faith can remove mountains only in the sense that it can create a person inspired to devise ways and means whereby the proposed bit of engineering can be accomplished. Prayer helps man to help himself. To admit freely and frankly the limitations of prayer is to forestall perplexity and anxiety as to its efficacy within its legitimate sphere. A young clergyman recently remarked that if his child were sick unto death he would pray, not for the purpose of saving the infant's life, but in order to reconcile himself to the inevitable, to find comfort and resignation and submission in the hour of sorrow. Prayer does not relieve one of some burdens, but does infinitely more when it helps us to bear them. Prayer alone will not set a broken bone, but will make the fingers of the praying surgeon steady and create an atmosphere of good cheer that will materially hasten recovery.

Then, too, there are bounds set to the power of prayer within the scope of suggestion. Fruitful as it is, there are

¹H. H. Jackson, *Ramona*, p. 187.

many suggested ideas that the subconscious is powerless to bring to maturity. A mental impression may fall within the field of suggestion and be too complex for self-realization. The vitality of the organism is too low and the life of man much too short to answer too complex prayers. The prayer that wings appear on the shoulders might be answered if man could live for countless milleniums, and if the life-forces of the personality were powerful enough to realize such a complex idea. The organic vitality of the dying is often too low to realize the prayer for recovery, no matter how firmly fixed in mind and confidently expected it may be. The reactions of the subconscious to suggested ideas are indeed manifold and complex, but it is by no means omnipotent; its vitality may become exhausted.

Many persons are temperamentally disqualified to receive dramatic and striking answers to prayer. Professor Coe, as indicated elsewhere, has shown the vital relation of religious experience to temperament. His statistics show that where striking religious experiences are attained, the element of sensibility predominates and the persons are of the sanguine (prompt-weak) or melancholic (slow-intense) temperament. Those who are subject to hallucination in general, are likely to receive answers to prayer in terms of voices and visions. On the other hand, those who expect striking and emotional religious transformations in response to prayer when their prominent mental trait is the intellect, and the choleric (prompt-intense) temperament obtains, are quite uniformly disappointed.¹ It is a matter of regret that the religious experiences of the highly emotional and suggestible have been standardized by some leading denominations. The efforts of many genuinely religious persons to

Lack of Organic Vitality

Temperamental Disqualifications

¹*The Spiritual Life*, p. 104 ff.

conform their religious experiences to the type in favor with their churches, despite temperamental disqualification, are truly pathetic and often lead to a revolt against religion itself. Mr. Coe quotes a person who expected but for temperamental reasons failed to experience a striking conversion. The disappointed person says, "Often I arose from my knees almost mad at myself for praying after having prayed so often without results."¹ It is well to bear in mind that the constitution of the mental life determines the form of the answer to prayer.

Doubtless many unanswered prayers are due to a lack of perseverance until one feels prompted from within to cease conscious striving in the direction of the answer. In the parlance of prayer, one should "pray through." In this connection the expression "praying through" is suggestive. Many writers of devotional studies of prayer emphasize it. One author says, "Too many fail to pray through. If the request is not granted at the first or second asking, they cease praying and say, 'Perhaps it isn't God's will,' and this they call submission. Dr. Torrey calls it 'spiritual laziness.'"² Another writes, "The strong man of prayer when he starts to pray for a thing keeps on praying until he prays it through, and obtains what he seeks."³ The psychological value of "praying through" consists in stimulating the neural processes sufficiently to insure the desired result. To continue the praying until one feels ripe for the surrender of the self to the larger life-forces is the usual mode of procedure. Sometimes there is a temptation to surrender the self in response to pressure from without before one intuitively feels prepared. Premature self-surrender under the social pressure of an exciting revival is doubtless responsible for many subsequent cases of "backsliding." Before the new personality has fully matured

Lack of Perseverance

¹*The Spiritual Life*, p. 149.

²W. G. Biederwolf, *How Can God Answer Prayer?* p. 216.

³R. A. Torrey, *How to Pray*, p. 66.

and is of its own accord seeking admittance into consciousness, self-surrender is worse than useless. When the subconscious product is ready to report itself, it knocks gently on the door of consciousness. The teaching of Jesus as set forth in his parables of the Importunate Widow and the Midnight Visitor, is a remarkable plea for perseverance in prayer until the answer comes. The want of a faith that knows no respite from its endeavor to realize the prayer is an invariable guarantee of failure.

What we have called contrary or negative auto-suggestion is another prolific source of failure in prayer. In the discussion of auto-suggestion it was pointed out that in order to be most effective the self-suggested idea should be positive. Since whatever is in the mind tends to express itself, only what one wishes to attain should engage the attention. A physician relates

Contrary Auto-Suggestion

that he once treated a young man addicted to a loathsome vice. The efforts to relieve the patient seemed to have no effect. One day a friendly conversation with the physician disclosed the fact that the young man was persistently praying to be delivered from the evil which was sapping his vitality. Believing that he had found the key to the situation, the physician ordered him to cease praying at once. Obeying the order, the patient was cured in a short time. It was the opinion of the physician that the prayers of the young man actually retarded his recovery because they were merely a rehearsal of the foul elements which he desired to eliminate. Too much stress cannot be placed upon the central fact of suggestion, which is that an idea attended to tends to express itself. The fundamental principle of suggestion rests back upon the doctrine that all consciousness is motor. Doubtless too many prayers are worse than useless because the mind is not filled with the ideas and ideals of positive virtues. On the other hand, it must not be inferred that no prayer clothed in negative terms is effectual. It is conceivable that in some cases prayer in the form of negative ideas may

act as a process of psychoanalysis or *katharsis* which purges the personality of the undesirable element. In the long run it is safer to avoid the mental imagery of what one desires to rid the self of by fixing the mind on positive virtues.

Many prayers are ineffectual because they are "vain repetitions." When the act of prayer receives an inadequate degree of attention it may become purely automatic and thus generate vitality and drain off through its open functional paths any distracting impressions which tend to interrupt its repetition.

"Vain Repetitions"

Hypocrisy, mental indolence, lack of personal initiative, habit and perfunctory observance of the forms of the religious life are some of the sources of "vain repetitions." Mr. Phelps says, "Perhaps even so slight a thing as the pain of the resistance to the momentum of a habit, will be found the most distinct reason we can honestly give for having prayed yesterday or to-day."¹ "Vain repetitions" as automatisms set free energy which may be expended in attending to something wholly foreign to prayer. Gentle promptings to devotion may be discharged through the channels opened by the "vain repetitions." Instead of stimulating the subconscious in the direction of the answer to the prayer framed by the lips, the insincere or thoughtless repetitions may increase subliminal incubation along lines positively inimical to the higher life. A case in point is the misuse of the rosary. While praying by means of this mechanical device, the petitioner may automatically reiterate the series of Pater Nosters, Ave Marias, and Glorias, and be all the time meditating something radically different from the "mysteries."

Many prayers made during periods of spiritual dryness are unanswered. The course of life may for some time continue to be so even and uneventful that prayer, if offered at all, has its rise in a sense of religious obligation, and not in an emergency. An unbroken course of life offers too little occasion for prayer,

¹*The Still Hour*, p. 13.

and hence the praying which does occur is either almost automatic, or a painful effort to hold in mental focus an idea too uninteresting readily to attract and grip the attention. Some devout souls ascribe these times of spiritual drought to hardness

and "unbelief of heart."¹ The very anguish and torture of mind such persons suffer in consequence of their difficulty to maintain a keen interest in the prayer life at all times is in itself proof that what they lack is not belief of heart, but fresh experiences which

Periods of Spiritual Dryness

will occasion prayer. From this point of view it is perfectly intelligible why the rosary is considered so essential to devotion by those who lead the secluded and monotonous existence of the cloister. Variety is the spice of the prayer life. The tendency of effective prayer is to vary directly with the vicissitudes of life.

If the prayer made involves a complex subconscious process and hence a long series of repetitions, occasional periods of rest should be observed. In some cases the answer comes more quickly than in others. One is warranted in anticipating

that under normal conditions the time consumed in answering the petition would vary directly with the complexity of the object of the prayer. The prayer of Mr. Sunday on the base-ball field was answered almost instantaneously,

Lack of Rest Periods

but the prayer of a sick soul for regeneration requires frequent repetition and a much longer period of time. It requires less time to induce a momentary state of confidence than it does to construct an entirely new personality. While an active faith is straining in the general direction of the answer to prayer and the corresponding nutritive processes are being set up, innumerable hindering tendencies are also being built up. If no period of rest obtains, the inhibiting tendencies are likely to become so developed that they undo the work in

¹See A. L. Strong, *The Psychology of Prayer*, p. 109.

the right direction. During a period of rest the less firmly entrenched hindering activities tend to atrophy, while the more deeply ingrained correct impressions mature. The time required for the subconscious maturing of a complex prayer may account for some cases of so-called delayed answers, which are ordinarily attributed to the overruling wisdom of God who knows best when to grant the petitions of his children.

As has been repeatedly stated, the most frequent reason given for unanswered prayer is want of faith. The apostle says, "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord."¹ Lack of faith is unquestionably a primary

Want of Faith

cause of failure in the religious life. In order to be kept burning, the flame of faith must be constantly fed. The judicious reading of prayer literature, the testimony of others whose prayer life is inspirational, the recollection of positive past experiences, may nourish

the faith state. Such exercises do not debar a psychological interpretation of prayer. Although the power in which faith is reposed is immaterial in so far as the answering of the prayer *per se* is concerned, it is unthinkable to exercise an abstract faith; normal faith is localized. When once a scientific readjustment to prayer has been made, many and sufficient reasons are found for reposing the fullest confidence in prayer. Analysis rationalizes faith. If prayer is reducible to laws which we can trace, it is rational to believe that the Power manifesting itself in these laws will invariably express itself in terms of them whenever and wherever the conditions are met.

It has already been pointed out that the success of all prayers depending upon the co-operation of others is due to

¹James I; 6-7.

their value as social suggestions. In all such prayers two extremes invite failure,—entire ignorance of them on the part of the person to be influenced, and too direct information of them. Where there is no hint taken, there can be no social suggestion. Although the avenues through which we receive information are many, it is safe to say that many prayers are unanswered because the proper persons have no knowledge of them. There is much to be said for the small boy who prayed for Christmas presents in a voice perfectly audible to his rather deaf grandmother who was listening to his evening prayer. Although he was addressing his petitions to the heavenly throne, he was making sure that his grandmother knew just what he wanted for Christmas. Of course the mere receiving of information is not a pledge of reciprocity; that depends upon the suggestibility of the receiver. Since women are more suggestible than men, one would expect them to respond to prayer more readily than men do.¹ In men the intellect is more prominent; the emotions are focused on definite objects and at definite times; the resistance to influences from without is greater. In women sensibility is more prominent; the emotions are more constant, gentle and diffused; they yield more readily to ordinary influences; hence the conclusion that women are more likely to answer social prayers than men are.

On the other hand, too much and too direct information of the social prayer is likely to result in counter-suggestion. This is especially true of the male sex with its marked tendency to resist ordinary influences from without. Indirect social suggestion in the form of mere hints and cues is likely to induce the state of suggestibility. Dr. Sidis formulates what he calls the law of normal or waking suggestion as follows: "Normal suggestibility varies as indirect suggestion, and inversely as direct

¹See Havelock Ellis, *Man and Woman*, chapter xii.

suggestion.”¹ In other words: “In the normal state a suggestion is more effective the more indirect it is, and in proportion as it becomes direct it loses its efficacy.”² Among his examples of indirect suggestion, the following may be quoted: “My friend Mr. A. is absent-minded; he sits near the table, thinking of some abstruse mathematical problem that baffles all his efforts to solve it. Absorbed in the solution of the intractable problem, he is blind and deaf to what is going on around him. His eyes are directed on the table, but he appears not to see any of the objects there. I put two glasses of water on the table, and at short intervals make passes in the direction of the glasses—passes which he seems not to perceive; then I resolutely stretch out my hand, take one of the glasses, and begin to drink. My friend follows suit—dreamily he raises his hand, takes the glass and begins to sip, awakening fully to consciousness when a good part of the tumbler is emptied.”³ To tell the person openly and plainly what is expected of him, is to invite the failure of the suggestion; hence some object is produced, or some appropriate gesture or movement is made, and these in their own indirect way tell him what to do.

Indirect Suggestion

Applying the law of normal suggestion to prayers intended to influence others, it is evident that when a mere intimation of a social prayer is sown into a receptive mind, the harvest is likely to be more abundant than when much information is directly given and received. Religious interest may be expressed in a look or attitude of concern, a warm hand-shake, or between the lines of a letter. We have observed how the personality responds to delicate and immediate stimuli, how the subconscious will take note of data imperceptible to the waking consciousness and elaborate them. The outcome of the social prayer is relatively dependent upon

¹*The Psychology of Suggestion*, p. 55.

²*Ibid.*, p. 52.

³*Ibid.*, p. 6.

the ability of the transmitter to given subtle indications of his inward states, and upon the receiver's capacity to interpret the delicate impressions and upon his suggestibility to them. Some persons are notorious transmitters: a stolid exterior hides their inner life. Others are all the time exhibiting the tell-tale signs of what is moving them. The difference in receivers is fully as marked. The subconscious of some persons is unusually sensitive and where this is true there is generally a tendency to rely upon the intuitions. On the other hand, every one has come in contact with the person who seemingly cannot take a hint. When a social prayer connects an efficient transmitter and a sensitive and suggestible receiver, the conditions for a positive reaction are auspicious. Doubtless many social prayers are unanswered because the persons involved are deficient transmitters and receivers. When it is satisfactorily interpreted, the unanswered social prayer is not wholly in vain, for the petition turns on itself and arouses the social sympathies of the petitioner.

Still another reason why so many prayers are futile is to be found in an unsettled mental attitude toward the whole subject of prayer. In the face of the complexity and enormity of the universe one may feel so small and insignificant that doubts arise as to the probability of reaching God through prayer. When this mental state obtains, prayers decrease in number and intensity. When prayer is made, the idea to be realized is not freely accepted, and is therefore not influential in giving point and direction to the subconscious activities. Another person may experience doubt and perplexity because no answer has been obtained to requests for things outside the scope of prayer. Failure to discriminate against unscientific petitions induces doubt as to the efficacy of prayer in any case. If he does

make a prayer, it is not imposed upon the mind with sufficient force to insure success. Still another person may catch a glimpse of the psychological principles underlying prayer, and react to the revelation in terms of disparagement or self-consciousness. Forced to yield his belief that God answers prayers directly without any intermedium, by departures from the natural order, he may at first

General Uncertainty

blush eliminate God from his interpretation of the mental processes involved in the answering of prayer. The depreciation of the prayer life makes it impossible to exercise the proper degree of faith, and consequently any petitions he may make are useless. Often the insight into the psychological elements of prayer results in self-consciousness. The attention is focused on the means of answering the prayer. Thinking of how the answer is to come instead of the idea to be realized, is almost certain to hinder the uncritical acceptance of the self-suggestion. In the description of auto-suggestion given above, it was pointed out that the most effective cases of suggestion are those in which the person has no conscious knowledge of applying the principles of suggestion. Mrs. Wiggins in a bit of doggerel aptly describes the plight of a centipede which was quite happy until the frog's inquiry, "Pray, which leg comes after which?" excited his mind to such an extent that he lay distracted in a ditch, considering how to run. In all such cases of mental uncertainty a readjustment to the universe as it really is is the only remedy. The normal man passes through three stages in his conception and practice of prayer. As a child he is credulous and uncritically accepts whatever he is taught of the place and power of prayer. As an adolescent he passes through an iconoclastic period and ruthlessly underrates the life of prayer. This stage is normally followed by a period of reconstruction which is characterized by the larger view of life. He who stood amazed in the presence of the complexity of the universe now waxes bold enough to assert his individuality in the conviction that he is an integral part of a larger whole. He

who was perplexed because in some cases the answer to prayer failed to come, now freely accepts the limits of prayer and finds within the range of personal influence an inexhaustible source of power. He who caught a glimpse of the machinery of prayer and stood abashed and embarrassed, in the course of time learns to ignore the processes underlying the answering of prayer and to confine his attention to the great purpose of prayer. As life ripens and mellows the foundations of prayer become increasingly secure.

Although the sources of futile praying have by no means been exhaustively treated, enough, it is hoped, has been said to show the direction in which one may look for the reasons for unanswered prayers. What has been offered indicates that negative prayer experiences may invariably be traced to elements which inhibit, or reduce to the point of failure, the state of suggestibility. By way of conclusion and summary it may not be amiss to draw some inferences from this brief study.

Summary

In order to contribute to an adjustment of the self to ideal ends, prayer should seek the deeper levels of moral insight.

Although the answering of the prayer does not depend upon the moral quality of the petition, for the sake of the conservation of the eternal verities a sense of ethical fitness should regulate the prayer life. Since the field of prayer is restricted to personal influence, it is well to discriminate against all unscientific petitions. Man is not justified in sighing for new worlds to conquer religiously, when he has not yet exhausted the possibilities of prayer within its limited range. The limits of prayer cannot be said to be narrow when within them we find every moral and spiritual need supplied. Neither is it a reason for complaint that within its proper sphere prayer is conditioned by the vitality of the organism. The average individual has subconscious energy enough to realize his petitions for moral and spiritual benefits. It should be remembered that it is useless to expect answers to prayer for which one is totally disqualified by reason of temperament. Mental struc-

ture, not character, determines the form of the religious experience. The substance is essential, the form is non-essential. Furthermore, perseverance is absolutely indispensable to a successful prayer life. Persistency in prayer is the price of religious advancement. The prayer itself should be stated or thought in positive terms. To arouse the mental imagery of the undesirable has a tendency to intrench it the more firmly. Let not the liar pray to be delivered from lying lips, but let him pray for the positive virtue of truthfulness; let not the thief pray for deliverance from the vice of stealing, but let him pray for honesty; let not the sick struggle away from disease, but pray for health. Let the growth of positive virtues eliminate evil. Nowhere is insincerity more unfortunate than in prayer. The maker of the "vain repetition" does not apply the principles which add to the world's stock of morality. The "vain repetition" turns on itself and becomes instrumental in subverting the moral life. Times of spiritual dryness occasion much dejection and depression among earnest religious persons. While they last, periods of religious drought make prayer extremely difficult to maintain. It is only natural that the crises rather than the uneventful periods of life give rise to most of the effectual prayers, therefore pious souls should not despair when times of spiritual dearth come. In order that hindering tendencies arising through effort may evaporate and the correct associations mature unmolested, periods of rest are necessary during the subconscious production of a complex object of prayer. After one has earnestly prayed for a season, to cease is not to mark time, but to make a distinct advance. Without faith, which directs subconscious incubation and then at the appointed time assumes an attitude of passivity and receptivity, effective prayer is impossible. The prayer life of a double-minded man is unstable in every way. Prayers which have for their end the influencing of others depend for their efficacy upon social suggestion. Total ignorance of the social prayer, or too direct information leading to counter suggestion, imperil the answer. To pray at a person is to subject the social prayer to failure. The most auspicious circumstances for the answering

of social prayers obtain when the praying self and the self to be reached associate under normal conditions and no conscious and direct effort is made to impart the content of the petition. The sensitivity of the subconscious may be relied upon to interpret the hints of the prayer and the outward manifestations of the religious interest of the petitioner. Normal indirect suggestion increases suggestibility; normal direct suggestion decreases suggestibility. Life is all the while subconsciously interpreting life. When doubts and fears assail the prayer life, the person should have the courage of a scientist to examine and sift the facts of religion. There is time enough to discard prayer after it has had a hearing and been found wanting. A scientific interpretation of prayer often creates a breach in the religious consciousness, a breach which only a wider conception of the universe can heal. To point out the wider considerations which grow out of a scientific description of prayer is the task of the next and last chapter.

CHAPTER VIII

WIDER CONSIDERATIONS

That private prayer is suffused with auto-suggestion is the conclusion to which this study points. The varieties of private prayer do not involve an equal and even distribution of auto-suggestion. In some cases it is more prominent than in

Auto-Suggestion in Private Prayer

others. In petitional prayers answered through the individual himself the element of auto-suggestion is most pronounced. In prayers answered through the co-operation of others social suggestion is the chief element. In devotional prayers, such as those of confession and praise, the influence of psychoanalysis is marked, but these prayers may lead to others involving a decided element of suggestion. When an evil is not consumed through the process of confession itself, its eradication or modification may be accomplished through petitional prayers. Although psychoanalysis characterizes the prayers of thanksgiving, adoration and worship, they may be continued until one-sided mental activity coupled with a general tendency to hallucination leads to a state of ecstasy describable in terms of auto-suggestion.

Such a reduction of prayer to the operation of mental laws combined with a religious flavor and sanction, raises vital questions the answers to which demand wider considerations. Should the prayer-habit be discontinued? How does the reduction of prayer to psychological principles religiously sanctioned affect the doctrine of the freedom of the will? How does such an interpretation influence the conception of the nature and character of God? These questions aim at the center of things by which men live, and merit serious consideration. They are specializations of the inquiry as to whether such a description of prayer is reconcilable with a religious, self-determinative, idealistic philosophy.

Questions Raised

These questions aim at the center of things by which men live, and merit serious consideration. They are specializations of the inquiry as to whether such a description of prayer is reconcilable with a religious, self-determinative, idealistic philosophy.

Such a description of prayer is reconcilable with a religious, self-determinative, idealistic philosophy.

To be sure the science of psychology is chiefly concerned with mental processes as such and when it undertakes to view its data in relation to ultimate realities it has become for the time being philosophy, and still it may not be amiss to suggest a possible adjustment of prayer as set forth in these pages to a spiritual conception of the universe.

Should the prayer life be cultivated or uprooted? When we can dispense with the Christian religion with profit, we may at the same time discard prayer. Christianity and prayer stand or fall together. It is the function of religion to adjust the self to what it conceives to be the plan and purpose of God. Prayer in some form is the means through which the self makes this adjustment. All the lines of Christianity converge in prayer. This type of religious behavior is essentially prayerful. Prayerful adaption to a spiritual order exerts a reflex

Should
Prayer Be
Retained?

influence on the adjustment to the physical environment, on the biological life of man. Holding the question of the existence of a spiritual basis of the universe in abeyance, let us be content to rest the case of prayer on its contribution to a better adjustment to man's

environment. If it can be shown that prayer is a signal factor in the biological fortunes of man, there is sufficient reason for its use. The question, then, is, Is prayer a determining factor in man's struggle for more physical life? Has it selective value, that is to say, in the process of evolution are the praying individuals, other things being equal, selected out and numbered with the surviving fittest? The writer is fully persuaded that prayer bristles with signs of selective value. Passing in rapid review a few typical results of prayer may establish the truth of this statement.

Let us note the biological value of personal petitions. Surely regeneration, the breaking of evil habits, the cure of dis-

ease, help in a predicament, coming in response to prayer, play an important part in the process of natural selection. By

**Personal
Petitions and
Physical Life**

virtue of new life-forces released within him, a deep-seated peace with the universe, high aspirations and noble endeavor, the social life of the Church, the reading of wholesome literature, the expansion of the personality in deeds of mercy and help,—by virtue of

these and unmentioned factors, the regenerated man is likely to survive his unconverted neighbor who stands in need of a recasting of the self. Religion at its best promotes the normal functioning of the organism: evil associations, a nameless dread of the future, are physically depressing.¹ Two persons, let us say, are painfully aware that an evil habit is the occasion of their maladjustment to the environment. To the one praying for it deliverance finally comes, and his organism in the course of time recovers something of its old-time vigor. The one who persists in his riotous living pays the penalty in decreased bodily strength and premature death. It requires no gift of prophecy to foretell unto whom the race of life will be. Prayer for the cure of disease concerns itself directly with the preservation of biological life. In a crisis when life hangs in the balance belief in the power of prayer may be the factor which determines the recovery of the patient. Since beliefs tend to realize themselves, the sick who pray for recovery are more likely to live than their fellow-sufferers who disdain prayer and are certain that they are about to die. Still another poignant illustration of the biological significance of prayer is the answer to the petition for help in a trying situation. In an extremity the person prays that he may be divinely guided: the petition calms the mind and enables him to think clearly; it relieves the body of the tension of fear and makes effective action possible. His troubled but disbelieving rival struggles on in increasing confusion and panic which inhibit incisive thinking and successful

¹See H. Begbie, *Twice-Born Men*.

muscular activity. In the struggle for physical existence the odds are against him and in favor of his prayerful neighbor, other things being equal .

Nor is selective value confined to petitional prayers: devotional prayers abound in it. The qualms of conscience make progress difficult. The prayer of confession restores peace of mind. It is self-evident that he whose prayer of confession has been followed by a sense of union with God is better fitted for the struggle of life than he who is tormented by the consciousness of disharmony with the universe. The unconfessed element disturbs the unity of consciousness, and as a consequence physical maladjustment to the environment follows. Much the same may be said concerning the prayers of adoration, thanksgiving and worship.

The Selective Value of Devotional Prayers

When the impulses to worship, adore or thank God are set free, a sense of satisfaction and relief obtains, which favors the physical life. But when the impulses to devotion are not liberated and only half-suppressed they haunt the mind and, in cases of extreme nervous instability, induce hysteria. Ordinarily the partially repressed impulses bring on nervousness than which state of mind none is less conducive to physical efficiency. Other things being equal, the devotional life by reason of its unity and freedom is likely to survive the irreligious life.

Nor are the prayers that mean to enlist the co-operation of others wanting in selective significance. Finding it impossible by his own unaided efforts to adjust himself to circumstances, the person invokes the Deity to place at his disposal the resources of the more fortunate. The help that comes in response to the petition enables him to make the adjustment and to conserve life. Thus far the selective value of the prayers intended

The Selective Value of Social Prayers

to conserve and enlarge the devotee himself has been considered, but he is usually solicitous not only for himself but also for the welfare of the species. He prays for others. His most fervent prayers of intercession are for the members of his own household who bear his name and strain. Such prayers may have their genesis in an

instinct to perpetuate himself by doing his utmost to make his children fit to survive. But the intercession is not necessarily restricted to one's blood relatives; specific prayers for others in whose well-being one has become interested may be made. Whenever his intercessory prayers are answered, the seeds of an individual's personality have sprung up to bear fruit after his kind. In helping others to make a better adjustment, he is increasing his own life, for the personality is enriched by giving as well as by taking. It is reasonable to infer that he who never makes intercession foregoes a means of quickening his own personal life and those to whom he looks for the continuity of his name and blood. The sacred flame of the torch of life which is handed down to future generations will be the dimmer for the lack of intercessory prayer.

In the light of the above facts it would seem that one is justified in holding that the praying individual, other things being equal, will survive his unbelieving fellow-man in the struggle for physical existence. In most instances, it is safe

Prayer Stands the Test of Utility

to say, the biological bearing of prayer is at the remotest remove from the mind engaged in prayer. The prayer is generally made to obtain immediate satisfaction without any reference to a more remote biological purpose.

Nevertheless, prayer does work of the highest order in furthering adaptations to the environment. Weighed in the balances of utility it is by no means found wanting. It is a reckless hand that would relegate it to the rubbish-heap which has accumulated during the upward trend of mankind. Unlike the more than seventy vestigial structures in the human body, prayer has not lost its function in the development of the race. It must not, however, be understood that prayer subserves only biological ends, that it has no function other than to give more physical life. It will be recalled that it was agreed to limit the discussion of prayer to its bearing upon the biological fortunes of man. A more comprehensive evaluation would disclose its significance as a molder of char-

acter, and character persists when the body has served its purpose.

The second question which arose is, How does the reduction of prayer to psychological laws affect the conception of man as a free agent? Psychology as the study of the mental process as such does not presume to answer the question of free decision; nevertheless, psychologists hold opinions on the subject which are entitled to respect. There is a growing tendency among many psychologists and philosophers to deny much which the older champions of freedom insisted upon, and to grant much which the

Prayer and Freedom

modern determinist affirms, and at the same time to conserve an element of free will of sufficient importance to make man a morally responsible being. These thinkers call themselves self-determinists. While they admit that heredity and environment are factors to be reckoned with, they deny that the basis of man is materialistic. They assert that there is in man an element not reducible to the strains of heredity or the environing forces. On the other hand, they modify the sweeping statement of the older exponents of freedom, and ascribe to heredity and environment many reactions which some have regarded as the outcome of free decision. The self-determinist takes issue with the libertarian who holds the theory of contingent choice. Professor G. F. Stout, a leading psychologist and self-determinist, says, "By contingent choice is meant a choice which does not issue out of the total processes of mental life in accordance with psychological laws, but springs into being of itself as if it were fired out of a pistol."¹ He defines self-determination as self-control which consists in "control proceeding from the self as a whole and determining the self as a whole."²

Some of the leading psychologists detect an element of freedom in voluntary attention. They maintain that heredity and environment cannot explain away the voluntaristic strain

¹*A Manual of Psychology*, p. 614.

²*Ibid.*, p. 615.

manifested in the effort to restrict the field of consciousness. Voluntary attention is elemental: it cannot be reduced to other and lower terms. To quote James once more, "Effort of attention is thus the essential phenomenon of the will."¹

Prayer and
Voluntary
Attention

Another writer has a word to the point, "The will reveals itself most directly in attention. It is often said sweepingly that a man's environment makes him.

Not to insist upon the obvious fact that there must be a germ with a certain nature in order that any environment may work its effect, it is particularly important to notice in the case of man that not his entire environment, but only that part of his environment to which he attends really makes him."² Now we have observed the important part which the attention plays in prayer. The forcing of the prayer upon the mind was described in terms of the attention. Without a marked degree of attention true prayer is impossible. Voluntary attention in prayer is selective in nature. Out of a number of possibilities the attention selects out and makes prominent certain objects of prayer. In order to sustain the contention that prayer may be an expression of the will, it is wholly unnecessary to prove that each and every prayer has its genesis in free decision; it is sufficient to point out the fact that an occasional prayer is due to choice. The vast majority of prayers are doubtless induced by environing forces impinging upon the self, but it is the small minority still unaccounted for that attest the element of self-direction.

Man has the innate power to attend or not to attend to prayer the realization of which may make or mar him, further his adjustment to his environment or even change an unfavor-

¹*Principles of Psychology*, Vol. ii, p. 562.

²H. C. King, *Rational Living*, p. 169.

able environment. Unless the will expresses itself in attention, the laws governing prayer are not made operative. Some one

Voluntary Prayer and Its Laws

has well said, "Human purpose and volition are perpetually playing into the system of law, thereby realizing a multitude of effects which the system, left to itself, would never produce, yet in such a way that no law is broken.

Natural law of itself would never do any of the things which men are doing by means of it. The work of the world is done by natural forces under human guidance. It is the outcome at once of law and purpose."¹ In view of the fact that an act of the will may make operative the principles which underlie prayer, it is puerile to raise the question, Why must we pray at all if a divine Intelligence broods over us and knows our every want long before we can formulate it? [Prayer is not a dumb-waiter bringing down from heaven gifts ready-made for those who are too indolent to exert themselves. Here also it is true that God helps him who helps himself. To demand that God set aside the natural order to grant a favor to an inactive and passive petitioner, would be no more rational than to expect to reap a harvest without sowing, or to live without eating.] In the matter of prayer man is self-determinative in so far as he by his own volition can attend to certain objects of prayer the automatic realization of which affects his personal life. The writer subscribes to the view that man is morally responsible because he on his own initiative may make operative the laws which determine his character.

The third question which this study raises has reference to the nature and character of God as revealed in a psychological

¹B. P. Bowne, *The Essence of Religion*, p. 136.

description of prayer. A study of the mental processes involved in prayer neither proves nor disproves the existence of God.

**The Existence
of God and
Prayer**

The affirmation or denial of the existence of God is more a reflection of one's world-view than an inference drawn from the findings of psychology. Psychology by searching cannot find out God. The writer accepts the existence of God because his philosophy

is idealistic. Contrary to popular opinion, the reduction of the facts of prayer to recognizable mental operations does not make the existence of God unnecessary and therefore highly improbable. Only the superficial mind consigns God to innocuous desuetude when once his modes of self-expression are discovered.

This study points toward a God who reveals himself in law and order. He is not the author of confusion but of regularity. The phenomenon of prayer is not only in a universe of law, but is also an integral part of it. To assign to prayer a well-merited place in the realm of natural law is to rescue it from the chaotic and capricious, from the weird and bizarre, from portents and prodigies, from infractions of and departures from the natural order. If God operates through law it follows that wherever laws are to be found he is manifesting himself. But let it be said with emphasis that to reduce prayer to laws written within us is far from offering an explanation of those laws, unless explanation is simply to show that a given fact is related to another fact with which we are already acquainted. The prayer life, even when reducible to law, is still an impenetrable mystery. The most that can be said is that prayer as a regular phenomenon seems to express the orderly nature of the Power sustaining it.

**Prayer
Reflects God's
Orderly Nature**

And that is after all a great deal. Ten-nyson in his justly famous apostrophe to the flower in the crannied wall says that if he understood it root and all he would know the nature of God and man. Yet this much we know about a flower: it cannot transcend the laws of its being;

it cannot grow suspended in midair in a perpetually dark cave. Although it holds in its petals the secret of the universe it pro-

claims to all the world that its author moves in an orderly fashion. In a similar way this study looks toward a God who is continually realizing himself in terms of the generalizations which we call the laws of prayer.

The conception of a God who lives apart from man out yonder on the most distant star in the stellar universe, self-contained and self-sufficient, should no longer obtain. The doctrine of the immanence of God sees in God the soul of the universe, the sustainer as well as the creator of all that is. Furthermore,

the artificial barrier which has been erected between the so-called sacred and secular should be demolished. The distinction is unfortunate. When we reflect that the psychological elements in the conversion of a Christian are akin to those in the conversion of

**The Sacred
and the
Secular**

a Sioux Indian, that the elimination of evil through prayer does not differ essentially from the breaking of a bad habit through suggestion, that the answering of the prayer for guidance out of a perplexity and the subconscious solution of a mathematical problem are reducible to the same mental processes, that the cure of hysteria and the relief afforded by the prayer of confession and praise are describable in terms of psychoanalysis, that divine healing and mental therapeutics owe their efficacy to suggestion,—when we carefully weigh all of these facts we feel compelled to posit a God principle broad enough to be the common source of these manifold phenomena. One and the same God manifests himself in the law of gravitation and in the answer to prayer. There is no separate and distinct system of law exclusively devoted to the answering of prayer. In the wise economy of the natural order answers to prayer and phenomena other than answers to prayer are the product of one and the same system of law. It is unfortunate that the things wrought through prayer have been invested with a peculiar sanction to the disparagement of the same things obtained through other means. A cure resulting through the skill of a physician has been regarded as secular, and a cure in answer

to prayer has been considered a special manifestation of God's power. When once the significance of the immanence of God is grasped, all healing is divine, all guidance is providential, all elimination of evil is the work of the Eternal.

If it be true that answer to prayer is obtained through the mental laws made operative by man, it follows that the purpose of man himself and not the mind of God is changed through prayer. The true end of prayer is the construction of a personality at one with God, and not the changing of the

Prayer Does Not Change God's Purpose

plan and purpose of the Eternal. In the equation of prayer man is the variable and the purpose of God is the constant factor. While we hold that God is the same yesterday, to-day and forever in his unchanging attitude toward man, it is equally and marvelously tenable that the answering of prayer through man is God's best opportunity for self-expression and self-expansion. Only as man chooses to express himself in highest terms of conduct does God himself come into his own. In a very vital sense we not only live and move and have our being in him, but he, in turn, lives and moves and has his being in us.

Manifestly nothing of eternal value is lost in a psychological analysis of prayer. We have observed that prayer is useful, that it furthers adaptations to the environment, that it is come that we might have life and that we might have it more abundantly, that, other things being equal, the praying individual is likely to survive his neighbor who neglects prayer. Prayer is not a pathological disturbance, but a normal source of power. We have seen

Summary

that the attribute of freedom, elemental in nature, expresses itself in voluntary attention and effort in prayer. Concessions to heredity and environment are freely granted, but a strain of freedom significant enough to make man morally responsible is conserved. Not every prayer made may be born of free decision, but only

an occasional and exceptional one. The exceptional case revealing an element of moral choice is of sufficient importance to establish the presence and potency of the will. Given the existence of God, the psychology of prayer reveals his orderly nature, breaks down the deistic distinction between the so-called secular and sacred, recognizes his presence in natural law, and holds that his attitude toward man is unchangeable. The doctrine of the immanence of God is in harmony with the facts of prayer as psychology interprets them. The psychology of prayer does not presume to prove the existence of God, but it aims to show how God answers prayer. From the point of view set forth in these pages, prayer involves the co-operation of God and man, being an act of the will making operative the laws of God written within man. Such an interpretation conserves the utility of the life of prayer, an element of self-direction in man, and an immanent God; are these not enough?

APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE ON PRAYER

The following questions mean to throw light on the subject of prayer, its nature and scope. This is not an attempt to establish any doctrine, but to find the principles which underlie prayer. The success of this study will in part depend on the number of persons who are willing to sacrifice the time and effort to answer the following list of questions.

Every confidence will be sacredly respected. We thank you in advance for any response you may see fit to give us.

1. Are you conscious of the presence of God when you pray?
2. In your prayers do you make constant use of the promises of the Bible?
3. Do you really believe that God will answer your prayers?
4. Has your prayer life been hindered by any of the following things: haste, irregularity, want of faith, lack of definiteness, etc.?
5. Are your prayers sometimes answered in unexpected ways? Give instances.
6. (a) What things do you make objects of prayer?
(b) What things, if any, do you regard as improper objects of prayer?
7. State what success you have had through prayer in the following cases: cure of disease, change of heart, temporal blessing, purity of life, elimination of evil, etc.
8. How do you account for unanswered prayers, if there be such?
9. Which do you find the more effective: public prayer by either the minister or the congregation, or private prayer?
10. Give an account of any extraordinary answers to prayer you may have had.

11. Were you accustomed to pray as a child?
12. Were there any family prayers in your home?
13. Please give
(a) Name, (b) Age, (c) Sex, (d) Church affiliation, if any.

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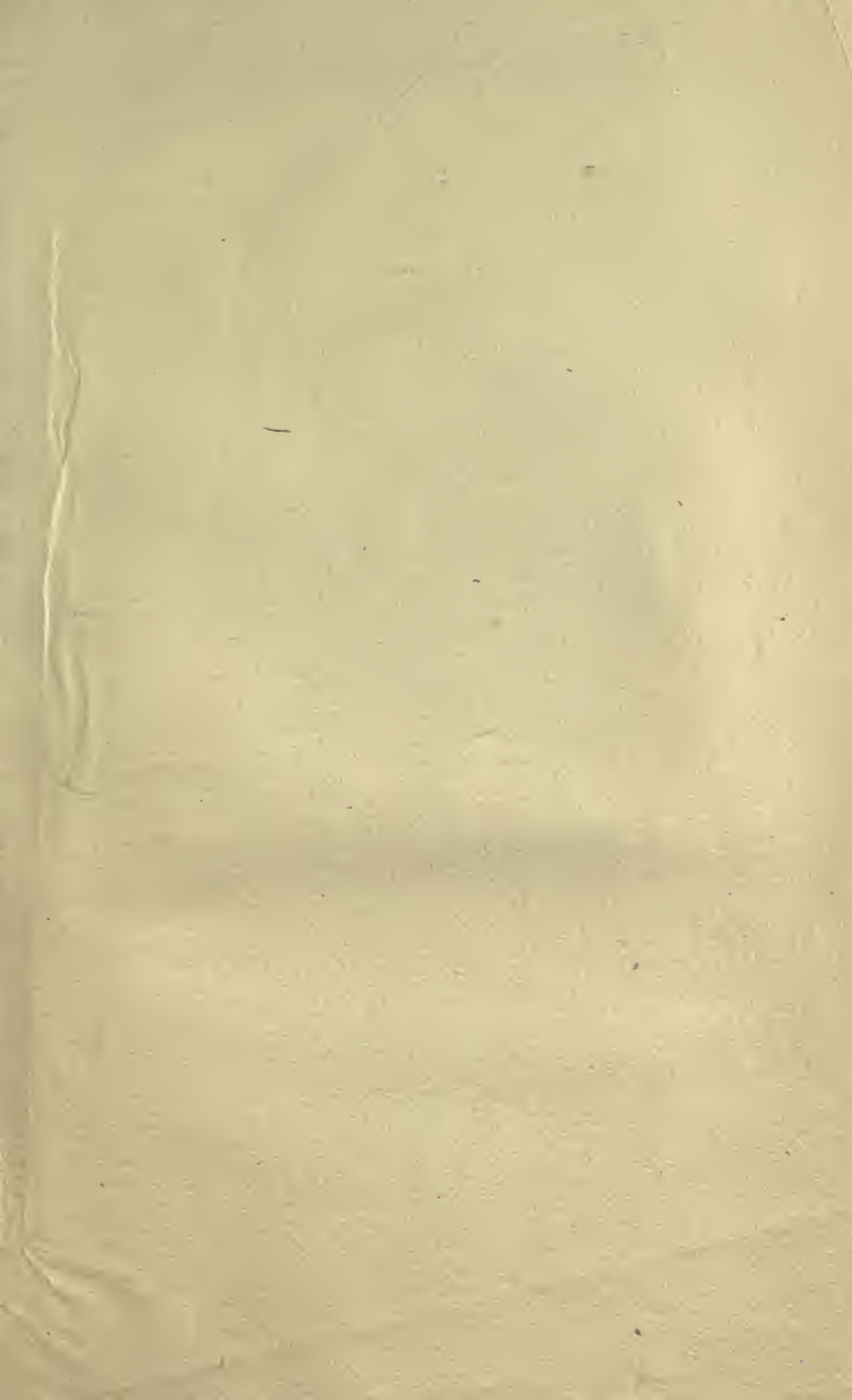
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