

# THE EXPOSITOR.

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## *SCIENCE AND THE CHRISTIAN IDEA OF PRAYER.*

“WHEN I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained ; what is man, that thou art mindful of him ? and the son of man, that thou visitest him ?” Such is the earliest expression of a scientific difficulty felt by the heart of man in the act of worship, the first sense of incompatibility between the claims of the human soul and the magnitude of the physical universe. It is, indeed, rather the prophecy, than the expression, of a difficulty. The Jewish Psalmist has only awakened to a sense of Divine condescension ; he does not doubt the dignity of the human soul ; he merely wonders that it should be so dignified. In so wondering, the Psalmist was scientifically in advance of his age, scientifically in advance of all the ages which the Jewish nation ever reached. The conception of the physical universe held by the people of Israel was highly unfavourable to the nurture of scientific difficulties, eminently conducive to the fostering of human complacency. The earth was an open plain in the centre of the universe, and all ends of the universe were designed to be its ministers. The sun had no other task than to light it by day, the stars no other mission than to illuminate

it by night. Man, as the inhabitant of the earth, was the central figure of Creation; for him all things existed, through him all things were sustained, towards him all things tended: Nature was only his minister. The conception of the universe which proved so favourable to the theocratic spirit of the Jewish nation was transmitted, in course of time, to the life of mediæval Europe—to exert a similar influence, and to effect the same result. If the life of the mediæval priesthood is intellectually less calm than the life of the Jewish theocracy, there is equally in the one as in the other an absence of scientific difficulty. Whatever speculations may have troubled the heart of the Schoolmen, whatever doubts they may have entertained, whatever problems they may have debated, there was one thought which never suggested itself to their minds—the insignificance of man in the midst of the created universe. Some of them were impressed with the insignificance of the individual, but all were convinced of the dignity of the race: humanity was still the centre of the universe, and the destinies of humanity were still the ground of universal existence.

The Reformation came, and carried in its bosom the seeds of a great change. That change, indeed, was less directly connected with the Reformation than is commonly supposed. We must remember that the religious movement of the sixteenth century had both a positive and a negative side: in the former aspect, it was simply the substitution of one creed for another; in the latter, it was the revolt from all past beliefs, without any attempt at substitution. If, in its positive aspect, the Reformation is most interesting to the religious mind, it is as a negative movement that the

secularist chiefly prizes it. There can, we think, be no doubt that its most widely diffused results have not been religious. In breaking with the past, it forced the human mind to begin anew its ascent of the path of knowledge, to divest itself of all previous beliefs in every sphere, to distrust even the methods of reasoning by which those beliefs had been attained. In no department was the revolution more complete than in the world of Science, and in no revolution were the preconceived opinions of humanity so completely overturned. It is not too much to say that the change from the Ptolemaic to the Copernican system of the heavens proved a more immediate and direct transformation of human ideas than the transition from the religious creed of the Romanist to the personal faith of the Protestant. It is not denied that the Reformation was followed by an age of religious scepticism, and of that scepticism the Reformation has often been made to bear the reproach. Yet, to our mind, nothing is more clear than is the fact, that the religious anarchy of the post-Reformation age had its root, not in a new order of faith, but in a new order of science. That stream of Deistic tendency which arose with the spiritualism of Lord Herbert of Cherbury, and culminated in the sensualism of Mandeville, was in no sense the result of Protestant individualism. It took its rise in a new apprehension of Nature, in a conception of the material universe in which the individual mind almost lost its Protestantism in the overpowering sense of its nothingness. Man had ceased to be the centre of Creation. The fond dream of the Jew and the Mediævalist had faded in the light of a new heaven and a new earth. That world, which men had believed

to be the most prominent object in the fields of immensity, receded into the far distance, and dwindled into the smallest of dimensions. That humanity, which, to the eye of Mediævalism, had appeared the centre of universal observation, crept back in dismay from the vision of its own decrepitude, and found itself to be only one amongst the myriad manifestations of life, almost the most inconsiderable of the infinite circles of Creation.

The sudden advent of such a thought could not fail, in the first instance, to produce religious paralysis, and that religious paralysis expressed itself in the form of Deism. It was, indeed, its fittest form. Deism is essentially the separation between the human and the Divine. It is not the denial of a God; it is not the denial of a future; it is not professedly the denial of anything: it is simply the conviction that God, and futurity, and all that relates to man's spiritual existence, have been removed from human knowledge and forbidden to human thought. Deism, in its deepest sense, is the destruction of Jacob's ladder; the divorce of heaven and earth; the denial of a possible communion between the soul and its Creator. It is here, for the first time, that Religion becomes impossible, because it is here, for the first time, that Prayer, which is the soul of Religion, becomes an impossible act. The votaries of a Pagan mythology may consistently ask for the gratification of individual wishes; the votaries of a Pantheistic unity may pray appropriately for the power of realizing that unity; but the votaries of a Deistic creed are pledged, by the very definition of that creed, to abstain from bridging the gulf interposed between the creature and the Creator: Prayer is here

an inconsistency. Such was the form of faith which the first apprehension of the Copernican system forced upon the human mind. Man was driven far away from the centre of the universe, and felt himself to be alone. He seemed to stand on the furthest frontier of an infinite creation. Between him and the Source of his being there stretched a yawning chasm. The Catholic and the Jew could have filled up that chasm by the interposition of their celestial hierarchy; but the Protestant had banished the hierarchy, and the void was to him an absolute separation. The God of the Jew and the God of the Catholic, if they had not been permitted to descend into perfect communion with the soul, had at least been allowed to occupy the topmost round of a ladder which united earth and heaven. But when Protestantism swept away the angelic ladder, and when Science swept away the belief that this world was the centre of all worlds, the spirit of man felt what it never felt before—the desolation of a life which seemed to have lost the possibility of Divine communion. Must not Prayer now be abandoned as a dream and a delusion? Was there any longer a channel of communication by which the finite could reveal itself to the Infinite? Was it not presumption in a creature of the earth to expect the interest of the Supreme Being? What was this earth? It was only a grain of sand on the endless shore, an atom in the forms of immensity, a drop in the fathomless ocean. What was humanity in the full extent of its being, and in the ideal completion of its history? It was only a breath, a vapour; at best, a passing stream of thought, hurrying on to be engulfed in the waters of an unknown sea. Had it not become the truest philosophy in the

creature to abstain from seeking the Creator, to admit that the supernatural lay beyond the range of his vision, and to adapt his life more persistently to the requirements of the passing hour ?

Here, then, was the beginning of that great conflict between the claims of Science and the instinct of Divine Communion, which has continued almost unceasingly through the course of three hundred years. It will be seen, however, that while the conflict has continued, the combatants have changed their battlefield. The earliest difficulty which the spirit of Religion encountered in its contact with the spirit of Science was the sense of individual nothingness imposed by the vastness of creation. It was pre-eminently the difficulty of the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries ; it is no longer the form of doubt distinctive of the nineteenth. The individual man of our day has ceased to be overawed by the aspect of the universe ; and, however his scientific convictions may conflict with his religious aspirations, there is no longer any conflict on the ground of human inferiority. Nay, strange to say, the antagonism of the nineteenth century between the claims of Science and the instinct of Prayer has arisen from that very process of thought by which the original scepticism was destroyed, has built itself upon the ruins of that difficulty which perplexed the mind of the ages immediately succeeding the Reformation. The transformation is so curious that it deserves a passing attention.

The sense of individual nothingness was imparted by scientific investigation ; the counteraction of that individual nothingness was to be imparted by the same investigation : from Science came the sting, and from

Science was to come the cure. For, let it be remembered, that at the very moment when the study of Nature was revealing to the human mind the vastness of the material system, it was preparing a revelation which in some respects was to bridge its vastness, and to restore to the human mind the importance it had taken away. That revelation was the discovery of what in modern times has been called "the principle of solidarity;" that is to say, a recognition of the truth that Nature, in its widest extent, is not a collective series of systems, but one great system bound into unity by one invisible chain. The science of the Copernican era had demonstrated that there intervened an infinite gulf between the lowest and the highest intelligences; the science of the succeeding ages was to demonstrate the counteracting truth, that the lowest and the highest of intelligences, however wide might be the interval between them, were members of the same economy, and were influenced by the same laws of being. When Newton discovered the law of gravitation, he took the first step in bridging the creative vastness, and in restoring to the spirit of man the sense of a possible communion with the Divine. The mythical story that Newton arrived at this law by observing the fall of an apple, however valueless it may be in historical fact, is deeply significant in philosophic thought. In the very statement that he had discovered a universal principle of Nature, he really promulgated the truth that the fall of an apple revealed the same species of creative power as the movement of the grandest orbs in the material firmament. In announcing that discovery he practically called attention to the fact, that the difference between small

and great had been reduced to a minimum; that the lowest spheres of creation formed one empire with the highest; and that the meanest forms of life were ruled by precisely the same principle which regulated the existence of the noblest and most beautiful. Nor was it possible that the human soul could recognize this without being lifted out of its sense of nothingness, and made to sit again in heavenly places. The ladder between earth and sky, which Protestantism had broken down, was replaced by Science; and the void between heaven and earth, which Copernicus had revealed, was filled up by Newton. That work of reconstruction, begun by the eighteenth century, has been followed up and almost completed by the nineteenth. The distinctive work of our day has been the investigation and the unfolding of that great principle of unity which Newton recognized. The eighteenth century arrived at the recognition of one common law; the nineteenth century has sought to travel a step further in the path of scientific unity, and has arrived at the recognition of one common force. The law of gravitation exhibited but the uniform rule according to which an unknown cause was seen to operate; the aim of this age has been to trace out the cause itself, and, if possible, to discover that this also is a unity. The result of modern research has been eminently satisfactory. It has ended in the discovery of a principle which has already opened up to the human mind a new view of this universe, and materially altered our relations to all the spheres of our previous study: we allude to that scientific doctrine known as "the correlation of forces." It was something to believe that the mightiest forces in the universe acted through the same law in the



greatest and in the minutest departments of being : but here we are asked to believe something more—that the mightiest forces in creation are themselves identical with those which the ordinary spectator would pronounce to be mean and inglorious ; that the most splendid exhibitions of power and the highest manifestations of beauty which the aspect of Nature can reveal are, in so far as they are the result of second causes, the effect of one common agency, passing through various modifications, as it enters into new conditions. If it be so, the human mind is on the borders of a thought which must at once exalt the material and elevate the spiritual region. On this principle of the correlation of forces, the elements of all celestial beauty are already on the earth ; nay, are already within the life of the human organism. The life of man is, in a more literal sense than ever, a microcosm of the universe ; in him concentrate, in an individual unity, all the forces which scientific experience has found concentrated in the unity of Nature. Here, again, as in the law of gravitation, the human soul is redeemed from its original scepticism. Man has awakened from his sense of nothingness, to find that he is an essential member of the great body of Nature. The vast, the terrible, and the grand in the universe of material being, have ceased to overawe him ; for he has discovered that he is himself partaker of all those elements which, in the framework of visible Nature, have excited the sentiments of vastness, terror, and grandeur. Physical distance has ceased to be an obstacle to Divine communion ; for the distance is contemplated no longer as a void, but as the stretching of a continuous chain which binds together the lowliest

and the greatest : and the spirit of man has aroused itself from the ashes of humility to realize its oneness with the movement of universal Nature.

Thus far, then, the scientific research of the nineteenth century has revived the instinct of Prayer. It has solved the difficulty of the preceding ages ; it has redeemed man from that nothingness in the order of Nature which made Prayer subjectively an impossibility. But the nineteenth century has only removed one difficulty, to create another ; and it has created this second difficulty by the very answer it has given to the first. It has told us that Nature is not a vast void, but a vast chain of continuity whose links are never broken. But such a conception of the universe starts a new doubt in the religious consciousness. If the links are incapable of being broken, if the law is uniform and invariable, what room is there in Creation for the interposition of human will ? What avails it that I should project my desires into an undeviating order of effects and causes ? If each moment is rigidly determined by the moment which precedes it ; if every event is linked to the event which goes before by a necessary bond of sequence ; if there is not to be found in the universe one solitary region where spontaneity reigns and the iron chain of law is unknown ;—is it not at once the wildest ignorance and the most daring presumption in man to hope that he can alter these arrangements by the simple expression of his will in a religious act ? Shall the power of Prayer undo what the power of Omnipotence has done ?

Such is pre-eminently the question of the present age as regards the attitude of Religion and Science. A few years ago this question was brought to the front.

It was discussed in the leading articles of newspapers ; it was canvassed in the graver articles of periodicals ; it was taken up in the ecclesiastical courts ; it was debated in scientific circles ; it was a theme of discussion in the intercourse of the domestic household. Every man had something to say upon it, and every man's saying was professedly a new light on the subject. We must confess that none of the solutions has precisely satisfied us. It is not in the immediate season of controversy that the best solution of any difficulty is to be found ; the heat of argument dims the logical vision, and blunts the logical power. It is after the personalities of a party question have faded in the past that mankind are able to view the question irrespective of the party, and to utter a judgment unbiassed by prejudice. When Professor Tyndall was calling for an immediate test of the power of Prayer, and when the advocates of Prayer had to find immediate evidence that all scientific tests were precluded by the terms of the question, it was no favourable season for the calm investigation of a great problem. Now, however, that the heat of argument is past, we may, perhaps, look at the subject with a more impartial, and therefore with a more searching, gaze. Let us begin by examining one or two of those efforts at solution by which, from time to time, it has been attempted to stem the course of scientific scepticism.

The most common, and the most popular, answer to the difficulty raised by Science may be called the purely theological one. It takes its stand on the nature of God, and reasons down from its conception of his nature. Assuming the existence of a Supreme Being, such a Being must be free. If He be the Author of

all things, He must at the same time be the Ruler over all. The laws of Nature can have no independent existence, nor can these laws be said to be immutable in any sense irrespective of the will of the Lawgiver. He who made them can alter them at pleasure; their being is simply the expression of his will, and their ceasing to be would be no more. The answer is undoubtedly founded on a pious sentiment. None the less it is based, as we conceive, on a mistaken view of the question at issue. When we say the Laws of Nature are immutable, we are thinking more of the past than of the future. We do not mean to affirm that we shall never enter into a system of things where the present laws will be modified. What we do mean is, that the present system of things is so linked with the chain of past effects and causes, that the notion of any intervention, either in its present arrangement, or in its past history as known to experience, involves a real or apparent contradiction of Science. To put it more simply: When we say that Nature is immutable, we popularly mean, not that it cannot change, but that, in point of fact, it does not change. Now, let it be observed, that this popular use of the word "immutable" leaves the scientific difficulty as strong as ever. Theology may tell what God can do; experience alone can tell what God has done: and if experience should tell that God's laws in Nature have hitherto been unvaried, it will be but a small compensation to know that as a matter of possibility they are not invariable.

A second form of solution starts from the admission of the fact, that the laws of outward nature are invariable; and from that fact draws the inference that the laws of outward nature cannot be the subjects of prayer.

Prayer can only extend to a region which is free and spontaneous, and the only region which is free and spontaneous is the domain of the human soul. *Here*, therefore, is the legitimate sphere for the offering up of our petitions. The material universe is bound with an iron chain, and in that chain are included all those objects which constitute the temporal wants of men. Temporal wants, accordingly, must be remitted to another sphere than that of petition; they must be entrusted to the beneficent arrangement of a pre-ordained Nature, in whose order there is no variability, and from whose verdict there is no appeal. Yet there remains to the pious soul a region over which it may wander freely, a sphere where the promise may be abundantly fulfilled, "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find." The world of mind is the region of Prayer; spiritual wants, spiritual desires, spiritual aspirations are its legitimate objects, and the obtaining of spiritual blessings is its legitimate goal. Such is the refuge which many earnest minds believe they have discovered from the rigid empire of scientific unity. Yet candour compels us to admit that it is a refuge which will not stand. When we speak of the invariable Laws of Nature, we employ the word Nature as co-extensive with all experience; we include within its range the world of mind as well as the world of matter. One material cause is not more strongly linked to another than is every mental conception linked to that which precedes it and to that which follows it. The laws of the human soul are as determined as those of Nature, and they appear to be even less contingent. There is no spontaneity in the motions of the human mind; even the age of childhood, which is seemingly

its most spontaneous period, is a sphere in which each event is linked to its corresponding cause. Men, in their primitive ignorance of Nature, believed the winds to be the creatures of impulse ; men of scientific culture have found the winds to be as much the subjects of law as are the stars in their courses. So, in like manner, have we every reason to believe that in proportion as our knowledge of mental law becomes more distinct and definite, our impression of mental spontaneity will become more vague and shadowy. We shall cease to think of the spiritual region as a region in which the sequence of events and causes is unknown. We shall cease to think of the human soul as a series of capricious movements existing without order, and operating without logical result. We shall recognize the world of mind as of all worlds furthest removed from caprice, because we shall see in it that "law of the spirit of life" which gives life and law to all other things.

The last of the erroneous solutions which we shall here notice is that theory of Prayer, advocated by Theodore Parker and other divines of the extreme negative school, by which the value of Prayer is placed not in any benefit received *from* it, but in the mental calm produced *by* it. The value of Prayer, on this theory, is its own reflex influence ; in other words, the advantage of offering up a petition is not the petition itself, but the mental exercise of presenting it. We might oppose this theory on theological grounds. We might say that it is built on the enactment of a fiction. No petitioner prays for the sake of being calmed in the abstract ; he is calmed by the self-deception of believing that he has got something which he has not got. But we prefer to meet this view on the logical, rather

than the theological, ground. If a temporal prayer, by which we mean a prayer for temporal blessings, be not recognized as having an objective value, it cannot be admitted to have any value at all. In a case of spiritual aspiration, in a case where a man prays to be made good and holy, it is by no means difficult to discover that, whatever other benefit he may receive, he has already been benefited by the reflex influence of his own prayer. But why so? Because the very offering up of such a prayer indicates that the man is already more than half in possession of his object. He who prays to be made good is already good; that which we desire most is our ideal, and that which is our ideal is the measure of our highest nature. But when a man asks for temporal things, he gives expression to no more than a sense of temporal want — an expression which is no doubt quite legitimate, and which, in a dependent being, may be even the performance of a duty, but which can never in itself suffice to constitute the proof of a spiritual nature. All that a man can get from temporal prayer is temporal satisfaction; and the reflex influence of such prayer is nothing more than the anticipation of that satisfaction. If the prayer be outwardly granted, it may produce the reflex benefit of deepening trust; if it be not outwardly granted, the original reflex influence will simply share the fate of every disappointed secular hope—it will die in bitterness of spirit. If we are compelled, through scientific pressure, to surrender our belief in the outward reality of Prayer, we shall certainly not surrender it under the impression that we have found a substitute in the shadowy doctrine of a reflex influence.

*Must* we, then, surrender this objective belief? This

is the question to which our inquiry has narrowed itself. We have examined some solutions of the question, and have found them unsatisfactory. Are we prepared to suggest anything in their room?

It has always seemed to us that the true starting-point in such an inquiry is not the nature of external objects, but the character of Prayer itself. We must consider what is distinctively the Christian idea of Prayer—what it implies, and what it presupposes. Let us begin with the presuppositions. We believe it will be found that there are three things which the Christian idea of Prayer takes for granted, and that each one of these assumptions is supported by the admissions of Science.

The first thing which is assumed by the Christian idea of Prayer, is the immutability of the order of Nature. We have already examined three attempts to reconcile the possibility of Prayer with scientific unity. We found the first of these practically denying the immutability of Nature; the second denying the immutability of that region of Nature to which it proposed to limit Prayer; and the third fully admitting the immutability of Nature, but concluding, as a consequence, that Prayer was practically valueless. The standpoint taken by Christianity on this question is, in our view, different from any of these; perhaps we should best describe it as the direct antithesis of the last or reflex theory. The reflex theory maintains that there is a fixed order of Nature, and that therefore the offering up of human desires can have no objective value. The Christian idea of Prayer, as we understand it, is actually based upon the notion that there is a fixed order of Nature; and that which, in the reflex theory,



is its destruction, is, in its own view, the very source of its life. How this is, we shall see presently. In the mean time let us grasp the presupposition which underlies Prayer—the assumption of an immutable order. “If it be possible, let this cup pass from me; if this cup may not pass from me, thy will be done:”—*that* is the very essence of Christian Prayer; and it is also the very essence of scientific unity. The will of God, in the Christian sense, is not an arbitrary mandate interjected impulsively and capriciously between the sequences of Nature; it is itself the last result of these sequences. The will of God, in the view of Christianity, is the highest expression of the highest law; it is that which stands at the summit of universal order, and forms the climax to which all things have tended. To appeal, therefore, to the will of God is to appeal to universal Nature, to invoke that law of Nature in which all other laws are comprehended. Christian Prayer asks nothing which is not already in the universe, desires nothing which is not involved in the Divine Will. It offers no presumptuous request to have the order of things suspended, or the course of time diverted. Its highest rest is in the truth that there is an order which cannot be suspended, and a course which cannot be diverted; for it recognizes at the summit of the great sequence a Will in which there is no variableness, nor the least shadow of turning.

But there is a second presupposition in the Christian idea of Prayer. It takes for granted, not only that there is a Divine order, but that this order is unknown to us; in other words, that we need Revelation. It admits that the law of Nature is immutable, but it desires to know what the law of Nature is. With this

presupposition also Science is in perfect harmony. Science does not profess to have found the central-principle of the natural universe; Mr. Herbert Spencer says that that principle is perfectly inscrutable. Science has not even discovered the minuter details of that law of uniformity which it actually beholds. Nothing is more certain, for instance, than is the fact that a perfect scientific knowledge could predict what weather we shall have to-morrow. That is a point already determined; it is involved in the sequence of Nature. Yet nothing is more certain than that no scientific man would peril his reputation upon an absolute prophecy of the complexion of to-morrow's sky. Still less would any man of science venture dogmatically to predict the particular line of action which, in any given case, would be followed by a human will, even where the general motives of that will were within the range of his knowledge. From the scientific point of view the actions of men are just as certain in their futurity as are the future operations of natural law; and a perfect intelligence could, by a simple intensification of natural power, predict the one as easily as the other. Yet, in both cases, the law of Nature in its minutest details, as long as it is yet in the future, remains a mystery. There have been men who have professed to foretell the events of life, and we regard these men as aspirants to the supernatural. Yet it is perfectly clear that, in order to possess such a power, there is required an intelligence the reverse of supernatural: the possibility of such prophetic gift is founded on the uniform sequence of Nature, and he who has possessed it can only have done so by a more intense perception of the laws of human thought.

Here, then, are two presuppositions of Prayer—the immutability of the law of Nature and the inscrutability of the law of Nature. The third and final presupposition is, the possibility that, in individual instances, the veil of inscrutability may be lifted ; in other words, the belief that the Source of Creation is in communion with creation. Now, strange to say, this point is also practically conceded by Science. According to the modern doctrine of forces, there is one inscrutable and ultimate force which is everywhere present and everywhere persistent, and in which all other forms and forces live and move and have their being. The universe is but its manifestation, the laws of the universe are but its expression. Christianity employs a different terminology, but it asks no more. It only desires the possibility of some communication from the Infinite to the finite. Like Science, it perceives an immutable Nature ; like Science, it recognizes its ignorance of that Nature ; and, like Science, it forecasts the hope that the law which is unknown will in some way manifest its presence.

Now the mode of this manifestation, in the view of Christianity, is Prayer. Everything in that Religion has two sides, the one human and the other Divine. Prayer, on its human side, is the creature desiring a gift from the Creator ; but prayer, on the Divine or higher side, is the Creator prompting the creature to desire. The ultimate conception of Prayer is not the idea of man asking of God ; but the idea of God revealing to man what he ought to ask, in other words, prophesying in the human soul what is the eternal and immutable law of Nature. Wherever Prayer is effectual, its effectuality is referred to the fact that it has been

prompted by the Divine Spirit. Man is uniformly represented as incapable of asking aright, as ignorant of the road to his own happiness, as liable to desire what would promote his pain. Hence the very key-note of the Christian idea of Prayer is given in that request of the disciples to the Master which called forth the form of petition known as the Lord's Prayer. "Teach us to pray," was the utterance in which the disciples expressed their ignorance of the immutable law of Nature; and the answer they received assumes that they were right in refusing to offer up their individual desires. The Lord's Prayer in the Christian Church is intended to represent the spirit of all Prayer, and it is therefore of special importance. In this form of petition the prominent characteristic, from beginning to end, is the surrender of the human will to the Divine. The earliest requests are made, not for the objects of individual happiness, but for the working out of the eternal and immutable Law to its beneficent conclusion and its highest goal—the hallowing of the Father's name, the coming of his kingdom, and the fulfilment of his will throughout the universe. It is only when the last of these points has been realized that the petitioner is permitted to contemplate his personal necessities; it is only when he can say, "Thy will be done," that he feels himself entitled to ask for his daily bread. He only does ask for his daily bread on the supposition that the granting of that request is involved in the universal Law; or, which is the same thing, in the purpose of the ultimate Will. His prayer will be a source of comfort to him just in proportion as it is a source of prophecy. If he believes that the bestowal of any external blessing is involved in the purpose of the ulti-

mate Will, the objective value of Prayer will be to him the fact that it prefigures the purpose and predicts the coming good. If he is in doubt whether the external blessing which he desires is involved in that order of Nature which is the expression of the ultimate Will, the comfort of his prayer in that case will not be its objective or prophetic value, but the recognition of the fact that there *is* an order of Nature. For, let it be remembered, that, after all, Christian Prayer is not essentially a series of petitions; it is the expression of one fundamental desire running through all petitions and conditioning them all—the desire to be made acquiescingly harmonious with the order of Nature and the will of Him whom that order expresses. To say, “If it be thy will,” is not a form of mere religious courtesy, equivalent to the conventional “If you please:” to regard it as such, is simply to fall back from the Christian into the Pagan idea of Prayer. There is the same difference between the Christian and the Pagan idea of Prayer as there is between the Christian and the Pagan idea of sin. Paganism knows nothing of sin; it knows only of sins: it has no conception of the principle of evil; it comprehends only a collection of evil acts. So, in like manner, Paganism knows nothing of Prayer; it knows only of prayers: it has no conception of a fundamental desire; it comprehends only individual wishes. The essence of heathen prayer is, to ask what we want; the essence of Christian prayer is, to ask what God wants, to “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.” It is because so large a number of nominally Christian prayers are really heathen petitions, that men have looked with alarm upon the rigid chain of unity

which physical science is weaving. In proportion as that chain expands, the prayers of Paganism must indeed more and more become philosophically impossible. The individual who sets up his own wishes as an absolute standard of desire, will be forced to learn that the law of Nature is equally with the law of Morality the enemy of human selfishness. He who asks a gift without reference to that universal kingdom of which he is a member, is performing an act distinctively Pagan, and is therefore pursuing a course distinctly unscientific. The popular expectations of heathendom were built upon the ignorance of Nature. Men had not reached the truth, that they were the subjects of one great law, and therefore they had not reached the truth, that they were members one of another. Their prayers were simply the expression of a child's individual desires. Science came, and that form of religion was no longer possible; but, long before it became impossible, it had been found to be unnecessary to man. Science came to proclaim that there was in Nature a principle of absolute unity; but a power was in the field before her, proclaiming the same truth in yet more urgent tones. Christianity anticipated the last voice of Science. She spoke, no doubt, in the moral sphere; but, to her, the moral sphere was the apex of the universe, and therefore the source of natural unity. The message of Christianity had the same relation to the prayers of Paganism as was borne by the message of Science. It told the individual that he was only one member of a universal commonwealth, and that he must not seek his life apart from the life of the whole. It told him that the law of his highest being was the law of universal

being, and that he only truly found himself by losing himself in the universal life. Christianity produced on the idea of Prayer the same transforming influence which it effected on all the other ideas of Natural Religion. It borrowed from the sphere of Nature the words "God," "Immortality," and "Providence;" but it no longer used the words to denote the ancient thought: the God and immortality and providence of Natural Theology passed away when the light of Christianity appeared. Even so, in the moral world, there remained something which seemed like the continuance of Pagan supplication; but the only link of connection between them was the sense of human dependence. Man in Christianity, like man in Paganism, still felt that he was in want of something; but man in Christianity no longer felt that he wanted the same thing. Paganism had questioned what it should eat, and what it should drink, and wherewithal it should be clothed; Christianity perceived that none of these things constituted the essence of human need. Paganism desired the gratification of the individual life; Christianity started with the definite assumption that the only ultimate gratification which that life could find was to cease from its own self-seeking, and desire the universal good. Christian prayer has become the antithesis of heathen supplication; and it has reached this antithesis by entering into union with that scientific life of Nature where the interest of the one is the interest of the many, and where the liberty of the individual is the service of the highest law.

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