

EXEGETIC STUDIES ON THE LORD'S PRAYER.

II.

IN my previous paper, after trying to give fresh force to the immeasurable importance of the fact that the Son of God should Himself have taught us how, and even in what words, to address His Father in heaven, I spoke of the simplicity, the brevity, the directness of the Lord's Prayer, and its infinite adaptability to all human needs. I will now point out some of the lessons of its structure, and the deep spirituality which differentiates it from all human prayers. I said that if the Lord's Prayer be indeed of so divine an origin, it must justify its origin by its absolute perfectness and flawless inspiration. The more we study it the more, I am convinced, shall we see that this is indeed the case.

I. Let us first notice the lessons which lie not only in the pregnant conciseness but also in the perfect symmetry of its structure.

The Lord's Prayer consists of an address to God, of seven petitions, and of a doxology.

1. Of the doxology we need not now speak. It is beyond all question a liturgical accretion, desirable, scriptural, full of value and appropriateness, but attached to the prayer by the spontaneous impulse of the Church for Eucharistic use, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit of God. It is absent from the Prayer, as recorded in the Gospel of St. Luke, and was almost certainly an addition to the original text of St. Matthew also. It is found in various forms; is based on Old Testament analogies; and was used, now in one now in another form, in the earliest documents of the Apostolic and Sub-Apostolic Church. "From the first," says Mr. Chase, in his valuable monograph<sup>1</sup> on *The Lord's Prayer in the Early Church*, "like other prayers, it had

<sup>1</sup> *Texts and Studies*, Cambridge, 1891.

attached to it now one doxology now another. The Lord's Prayer was (as the *Didaché* seems to suggest) in this way frequently adapted for use at the Service of Holy Communion; and finally one form of doxology, which appears to be a conflation of two distinct forms, was added to the Prayer in the 'Syrian' text of St. Matthew's Gospel, and so has remained the common conclusions of the Prayer since the fourth century."

2. But though it is now admitted that the Doxology formed no part of the structure of the Lord's Prayer as originally delivered, some may hold that the body of the prayer consists of *six*, not of seven clauses. They will take the view which many have taken, and among these Archbishop Leighton, that the words, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" do not constitute two clauses, but one, of which the second half is only an exegesis of the first. I cannot now pause to prove that this is an error, and that the clause, "deliver us from the evil one"—for such is almost certainly the exact meaning of the last petition—is separate from the previous clause,<sup>1</sup> and comprehensively sums up the entire Prayer, of which it is indeed the universal climax. But were this a matter of uncertainty in other respects, the symmetry of *seven* petitions would have some weight in turning the balance. Material and practical ages, and that attitude of the Western mind which makes it usually indifferent to, and even contemptuous of anything which bears upon a mysticism which is to it unintelligible, may regard this

<sup>1</sup> "There are that make but six petitions of this prayer, saying that the two last are but one; but they have no warrant for it. The Ancient Church hath always divided it into seven; in this division they grounded upon the motive which caused our Saviour Christ to pen (*sic*) this prayer, which was the avoiding of that *ταυτολογία* used by the heathen, into which they cannot choose but fall, which affirm that these two last petitions contain but one thing; wherein they are deceived, for temptations and evil are not of one scantling. Every evil is not temptation, neither is every temptation evil."—Bishop Andrewes, *The Lord's Prayer*, Sermon xvii., *opp.* v. 449.

symmetry as insignificant. It would have been far otherwise with Jews and Easterns in general. With them considerations of rhythm and number entered largely into sacred things. In the poetry of the Old Testament the form is repeatedly dependent on numerical arrangements which involved a deep symbolism. The Hebrews attached a mystic importance even to the physiological qualities of sound. In their view of the nature of language they were analogists not anomalists—in other words they held that names originated by nature (*φύσει*), not by convention (*θέσει συνθήκη*), and that their form and significance were determined by some inward necessity, not by arbitrary caprice. Similarly they attached a deep importance to numbers. Any one who will study the details of Solomon's Temple, or its ideal reconstruction by the Prophet Ezekiel, will see that the minutest details were determined by the sacredness and significance of particular numbers. The sense of this sacredness continued through the Middle Ages. Why is the number Three impressed on Westminster Abbey, and all our great minsters in the triple height, and length, and breadth, as it was also impressed on the Jewish Temple, except because the number Three is the signature of the Divine? Why does the number Seven dominate in the arrangement of the pillars, except with reference to "Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars"? Why did Dante not think it unimportant to invent for his Divine Comedy the *terza rima*, and divide his poem into three parts, of which each contains 33 cantos? The numbers 3 and 7 are stamped with the signature of Godhead and of God's relation to man. The number 3, as explained by Bähr, the chief modern student of the symbolism of numbers, expresses "the concrete and perfect unity resulting from the reconciliation of difference and opposition." Four is "the number of the world, the sum of all created things, and of Divine revelation."

The number 7, according to the same authority, being the sum of 3 + 4, stands, according to the hidden properties of numbers, for "the combination of God and the world." Whatever may be thought of this, it is certain from endless instances in the Bible that the Jews attached to the number Seven a peculiar sanctity and meaning. "It was considered," says Kalisch, "as the number of combination and connection, of unity and harmony, of salvation and blessing, of peace and sanctification, of the covenant between God and Israel (and therefore in some respects as the theocratical number), of expiation and atonement, of purification and initiation."<sup>1</sup> It was, whether from astronomical or other reasons, also regarded as mystic by the Greeks and Romans. "Septem," says Cicero, "*qui rerum fere omnium modus est.*"<sup>2</sup> "Pleraque cœlestium," says Tacitus, "*vim suam et cursum septimos per numeros conficiunt.*"<sup>3</sup> The Lord's Prayer fell naturally into 7 petitions, and in impressing this number upon it, and in giving it this form, our Lord lent it an additional solemnity to the Eastern Churches, among which the Gospel was first established. Nor is the fact unworthy of notice that the first *three* petitions refer directly to the glory of God, and the last *four* to the needs of man.

3. The Lord's Prayer would not be Divine if it were not Catholic in the true sense of universal charity, universal comprehensiveness, universal adaptation to the yearnings of every soul, of every creed, which longs and thirsts for God and for righteousness, as the hart panteth after the waterbrooks. In this sense it is the Divine presentation of true religion. What is religion? The word has received many definitions. Plato called it "a likeness to God, according to our ability"; John Smith, "the seed of God

<sup>1</sup> On Exodus, p. 449.

<sup>2</sup> Cic., *Somnium Scipionis ad init.*

<sup>3</sup> Tac., *Hist.* v. 4; comp. Plin., *H. N.*, xi. 43.

in the spirits of men"; Schelling, "the union of the finite with the Infinite."<sup>1</sup> Kant was very near the mark when he saw the essence of religion in obedience to the categorical imperative; and Jeremy Taylor, when he defined it as "the whole duty of man, comprehending in it justice, charity, and sobriety."

But no better definition was ever given of religion than that given by the great and strong thinker, Benjamin Whichcote, when he wrote "religion means a good heart and a good life." All the deepest and loftiest parts of the Divine teaching in Scripture seem intended to warn us of the errors which confuse religion pure and undefiled with the acceptance of elaborate theologies, the membership of exclusive organisations, or adherence to what is claimed as the only orthodoxy in matters of opinion respecting which Christians differ. The one lesson impressed upon us from the beginning to the end of the Bible, and with strongest emphasis in its most glorious passages, is that the only tests of religion which are of the least value are right conduct and holy character. All else will vanish, this will remain. Of the many lies which "God's infinite and fiery finger" will shrivel from the souls of men, the most numerous, and among the most deleterious, will be all sorts of religious shams, unrealities, human systems, shibboleths, and commandments, which priests have added to the pure truth of the Gospel. Says Dr. Oliver W. Holmes, "Men are tattooed with their special beliefs like so many South Sea Islanders; but a real human heart, with Divine Love in it, beats with the same glow under all the patterns of all earth's thousand tribes." Turn the pages of religious controversy, teeming as they do to this day with the poisonous fruits of envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, and in proportion as they claim to be the defence and representation of the sole truth of religion,

<sup>1</sup> See Parker, *Discourse of Religion*, p. 27.

they will at once be seen to abound in the glossy leaves of arrogant Pharisaism, which are not for the healing but for the embitterment of the nations. The only genuine fruits of the Tree of Life are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. These do not result from the acceptance of all the finely-articulated dogmas and yokes of bondage which ambitious priests and erring Churches have imposed on the free neck of Christendom, but on the faith in Christ, and the union with Christ. It is this faith which issues in obedience to the Ten Words which constitute the old, simple, majestic Voice of Sinai. The Law alone carries with it no power to secure our obedience; Christ came to deliver us by His Gospel from the curse of the Law. On the two Commandments—Love God with all thy heart, and Love thy neighbour as thyself—hang all the Law and the Prophets. The possibility of obeying the Second Commandment depends solely on obedience to the First. The possibility of obeying the first depends on the forgiveness which Christ has procured for us, and the strength and faithfulness which He inspires. The means whereby we can avail ourselves of this Heavenly Grace is Prayer; and I see at once on the Lord's Prayer the stamp of its Divine origin when I see that it indicates only the Eternal essentials of true religion, and excludes everything which is either in its essence anti-religious, or, at the best (to use the phrase of Hillel) "only commentary and fringe."

4. There is another most divine element in this prayer besides this catholicity which makes it equally precious to all of every fold, who, with whatever differences, love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth. It is the unapproachable spirituality of the teaching which it involves.

This is observable in the very first petition. I think that if we would confess the honest truth, many—perhaps all except the maturest saints of God—would admit that of

all the petitions the one which least comes home to them, the one which seems to them the most vague and the least real, is the first. Yet would our Lord have made room for it, much more would He have put it in the very forefront, though He had just been uttering the strongest warnings against artificial and vain petitions, if it had not been of supreme importance, and if He had not intended it to lead the way into the innermost shrine of all true prayer? As the first star is the most lustrous of all the night—

“Hesperus, that led  
The starry train, rode brightest”—

so may not this petition be in some sense the brightest of all—the most radiant in this Pleiad of seven petitions?

5. What we are too apt to overlook in offering the Lord's Prayer is its direct and divine *instructiveness*; the illuminating light which it flings upon the nature of God and our relation to Him. The very fact that this petition—“hallowed be Thy name”—is about the last we should have thought of enshrining in our supplications to Heaven, is a measure of its necessity. If the plural “our” instead of the singular “my” in the first word of the prayer, and throughout it, was meant to teach us the duty of unselfishness; this petition “Hallowed be Thy name” was meant to go farther and deeper, and to teach not only unselfishness but *self-forgetfulness*—self-annihilation, so far as self is at enmity with God. It wields the axe against the root of that love of self from which springs every form of rebellion and wickedness. It points to the absorption, the annihilation of self in God. It teaches us, and with all the more force because so indirectly, that no man liveth to himself and no man dieth to himself, but that man's chief end is “to glorify God here,” and “enjoy Him for ever in heaven hereafter.”

6. This lesson, this characteristic, is woven into the very

tissue and essence of the prayer, because no lesson is more intensely needful. The form which our prayers tend to assume is that poor bargaining of the yet imperfect Patriarch. "If thou wilt give me bread to eat and raiment to put on . . . THEN shall the Lord be my God." Sometimes it fatally resembles the mean cry of the poor Mohammedan, "Oh, Allah, I want a hundred sequins, give me a hundred sequins, just a hundred sequins. O Allah, all I ask of Thee is a hundred sequins—neither more nor less." The only one of the seven petitions with which the carnal mind has much affinity is "Give us this day our daily bread"; and even that it despises as scanty and insufficient, unless it can alter the form from the plural to the singular, exclude from it every spiritual element, and make daily bread include the comforts, riches, and luxuries of life. It is not only the ignorant heathen who are ever pestering God with selfish and unseemly desires, like worthless vagrants who burst with their mendicancy into the presence of a king. Perhaps there may be not a few who, with slight disguises, and in the secret back chambers of their being, offer positively wicked prayers like—

"Pulchra Laverna,  
Da mihi fallere da justo sancto videri;  
Noctem peccatis et fraudibus objice nubem"—<sup>1</sup>

or like Saul's request to Samuel to honour him before the elders of the people though he had sinned; or like the prayer which the unconverted Augustine offered against the lusts of his youth with the secret reservation of a hope that God would allow him to indulge himself in them a little longer; or like that in the heart of the adulterous murderer in the great tragedy that he might be pardoned, and yet retain the offence; or like that of the Indian Thug that he may murder more victims as a sacrifice to his goddess; or

<sup>1</sup> Hor., *Epp.*, I. xvi. v. 6.



that of the Italian brigand to the Virgin for the success of his raid. Perhaps our prayers are not often so desperately evil as this, because we cannot but feel that "If I incline to wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." But how often do they abound in the kind of personal beggary which Christ discourages as the degradation of all prayer. So that as the very initial lesson of all prayer He teaches us to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness," and all other needful things will be added unto us. He utterly discountenances the putting of our miserable selves, and of our own mean desires, into the forefront. He teaches us how deadly is the egotism which makes us treat our own small individuality as the sole centre of our own universe. He teaches us that the moral and spiritual order of the only life which is true life rolls round Him the risen Sun of righteousness. He teaches us that the one object of prayer is "to *become* and not to *get*"; and if we would but print deep upon our hearts the truth that the type of all acceptable prayer is not the "Give, give," of the daughters of the horseleech, but, "Hallowed be Thy name," neither our lives nor our prayers would be so poor.

7. This lesson of the spirituality of prayer—this lesson that there is no real life for man save the life of his spirit, and that there can be no life of his spirit save in God, is so completely the Alpha and Omega of this prayer that we shall see more of the truth hereafter. But we should notice how divinely the inestimable boon of prayer is thus safeguarded not only from wicked, futile, and selfish prayers, but even from too wilful an insistence on prayers which might seem innocent and natural, and yet might prove to be in their issue ruinous. For the better heathen knew as well as we do that prayers urged upon God with too unwise and wilful an importunity may prove to be dangerous things. The English poetess writes—

“God answers sharp and sudden on some prayers,  
And flings the thing we have asked for in our face,  
A gauntlet with a gift in it.”

Our great dramatist teaches us that—

“We, ignorant of ourselves,  
Beg often our own harms, which the wise gods  
Deny us for our good; so find we profit  
By losing of our prayers”;

Pope tells us of—

“Atossa, cursed by many a granted prayer”;

But we read also in Vergil—

“Evertere domos totas optantibus ipsis  
Di faciles”;

and in Juvenal—

“Si consilium vis  
Permittes ipsis expendere numinibus quid  
Conveniat nobis rebusque sit utile nostris,  
Nam pro jucundis, aptissima quæque dabunt Di,  
Carior est illis homo quam sibi.”<sup>1</sup>

The hymnist is but versifying sentences of Plato and of  
Menander when he writes—

“Not what we *wish*, but what we *want*,  
Thy bounteous grace supply,  
The good unasked in mercy grant,  
The ill, though asked, deny.”<sup>2</sup>

But from the perils of all such earthly ignorance we shall  
be saved if we learn the spirit of the Lord's Prayer; for  
there while man's earthly needs are recognised in their

<sup>1</sup> *Juv. Sat.*, x. 346-349. Comp. the opinion of Socrates, who “nihil ultra petendum a Diis immortalibus arbitrabatur, quam ut bona tribuerent, quia ii demum scirent quid unicuique esset utile.” *Val. Max.*, vii. 2. *Xen., Mem.*, i. 3, § 2.

<sup>2</sup> Ζεῦ βασιλεῦ τὰ μὲν ἐσθλά καὶ εὐξαμένοις καὶ ἀνεύκτοις  
Ἄμμι δίδου, τὰ δὲ δευὰ καὶ εὐχομένοις ἀπαλέξειω.

*Plat., Alc.*, ii. p. 143.

μη μοί γένοιθ' ἄ βούλομ' ἀλλ' ἄ συμφέρει.

*Menand., Sent.*, 336.

simplest and most comprehensive form, and his spiritual needs are more expressly pleaded, he is taught that both must be subordinated to the higher, deeper, more universal interests of all created Beings, and are therefore absorbed and overshadowed by the Eternity and Incomprehensibility of the Divine. The lesson of life is learnt in its most perfect form when we can say with all our hearts, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison with Thee." St. Thomas Aquinas showed how well he had learnt this lesson, when to the question of the Vision of Christ, "Thou hast written well of Me, O Thomas, what reward dost thou desire?" he meekly answered, "*Non aliam mercedem nisi Te, Domine.*" The cry of the whole Lord's prayer is, O Lord, fill us out of Thy fulness; fill us with Thyself.

"Who hath this he hath all things having nought,  
Who hath it not hath nothing having all."

It is the truth which has been so finely expressed by Mr. J. R. Lowell :

"Twere glorious, no doubt, to be  
One of the strong-winged Hierarchy,  
To burn with Seraphs, or to shine  
With Cherubs, deathlessly divine;  
Yet I, perhaps, poor earthly clod,  
Could I forget myself in God,  
Could I but find my nature's clew  
Simply as birds and blossoms do,  
And but for one rapt moment know  
'Tis Heaven must come not we must go,  
Should win my place as near the throne  
As the pearl angel of its zone,  
And God would listen 'mid the throng  
For my one breath of perfect song,  
That in its simple human way  
Said all the Host of Heaven could say."

F. W. FARRAR.