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# THE PROVINCE OF PRAYER.

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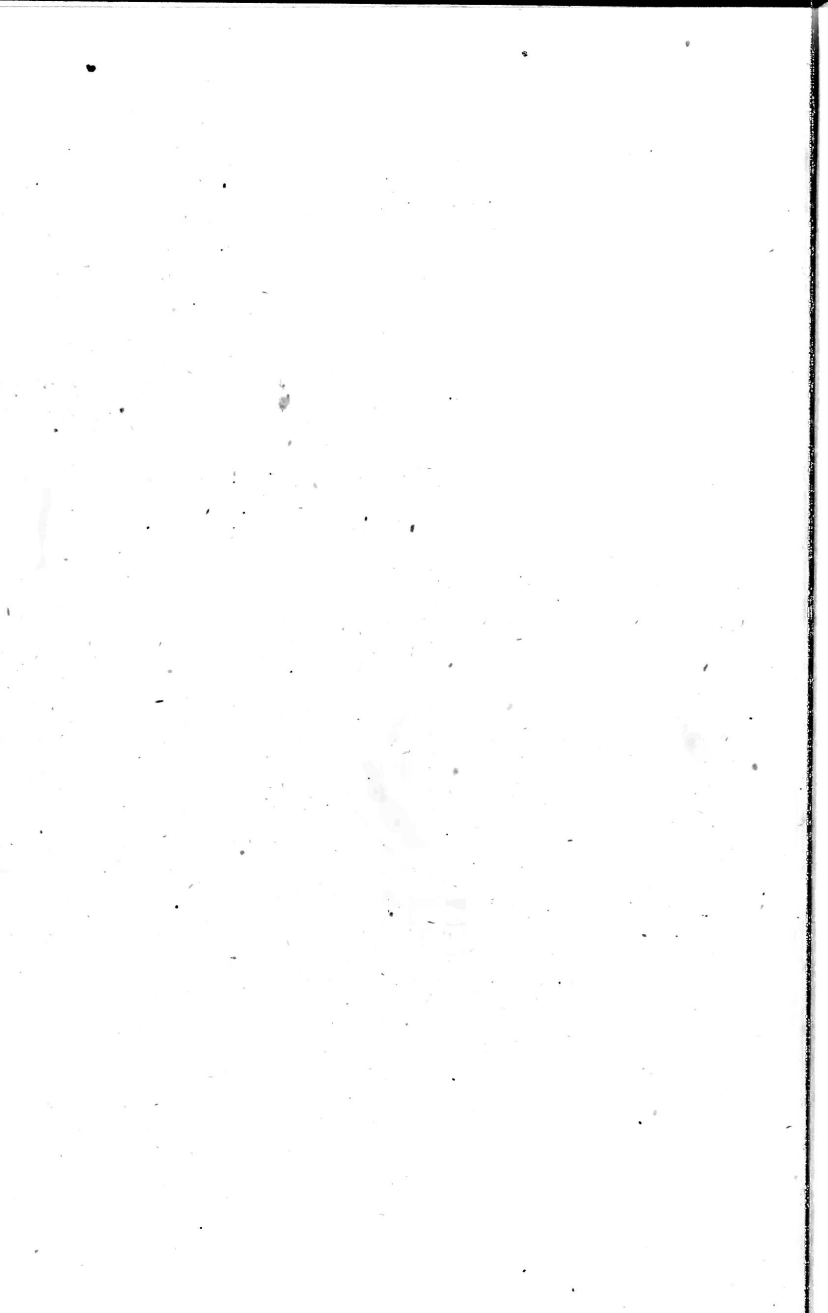
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## THE PROVINCE OF PRAYER.

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THE important controversy upon the efficacy of prayer that has recently occupied the attention of some of our most thoughtful writers and readers has not resulted in any approach towards a settlement of the vexed question. Nor could any definite verdict easily be given by the most impartial of judges who should undertake to sum up the arguments on either side as they have been placed before us. The discussion is like a battle, of which the sphere of operations is too large to allow a spectator to ascertain the effect of the various movements. An attempt was indeed made at the outset to narrow the basis of the controversy, but it was unsuccessful. The proposition of a practical test of the value of one particular kind of prayer, *i.e.*, prayer for the sick, was at once rejected with horror and indignation by the so-called religious world. If the challenge had been accepted by the advocates of prayer for the sick, and one ward of a hospital had been selected for the special supplications of believers, with a view to prove statistically that prayer is answered, it is extremely improbable that the result would have been acknowledged to be conclusive by either party. Supposing that in the ward selected the recoveries had not been above the average of recoveries in other wards, the orthodox would have declared that the result only showed that God had defeated the infamous attempt of the faithless to gauge His mercies. It would further have been urged that the patients in the other wards had been

prayed for with equal earnestness, and perhaps with special earnestness, by those who could not bear the thought that any sick people should suffer from the lack of prayers for their recovery. If, on the other hand, the result had been a larger per centage of recoveries in the selected ward, those who deny the efficacy of prayer for the sick would either have declared that such a result was accidental, or that it was owing, not to any supernatural influences, but entirely to the extraordinary attention and exertions of doctors and nurses, stimulated by a superstitious belief that their efforts, thus specially assisted by prayer, were sure to be successful. Now, as hardly any one denies this last-mentioned indirect effect of prayer upon people who believe in its efficacy, no victory could have been claimed. A result at least as conclusive might be shown in favour of the blindest fatalism, as it is well known that soldiers whose religion teaches them to believe that whatever danger they may be in, they cannot be killed before their appointed time, fight with a desperate courage that often ensures them the victory, when without so unreasonable a belief they would have been defeated. It is further to be observed, that this indirect efficacy of prayer for the sick is in inverse proportion to the *practical* belief of the doctors and nurses in God's unaided action upon the patient, and in direct proportion to their practical faith in their own exertions. Thus the Peculiar People, the only consistent believers in the supernatural efficacy of prayer for the sick, trust entirely to the Divine action; and many lives are lost that human care and skill would have saved. Strange to say, these devout people are almost universally condemned by the orthodox, and are even punished by the law of the land for having too strong a faith in the efficacy of prayer. Those who, less consistently, but more reasonably, adopt the principle of trusting in Providence and keeping their powder dry, admit that God answers prayer for the



sick only by blessing the "means" employed. It is, of course, for them to prove that He would not equally bless the means if they had not prayed at all. There does not exist a tittle of evidence to show that it would not be so ; and the opponents of prayer for the sick have reasonable ground for maintaining that, *other things being equal*, such prayer does not produce the slightest effect. That is to say, if doctors and nurses, who neither pray themselves nor trust in the prayers of others, make equal efforts for the recovery of their patients with doctors and nurses who both pray themselves and trust in the prayers of others, the results will be equal. The only difference is, that the faith of the former is exercised in favour of the scientific remedies and careful attention that are known to promote the recovery of the sick, whilst the faith of the latter is *ostensibly*, if not practically, directed towards some occult influence, of which we *know* absolutely nothing. Similarly with the patients themselves : if their hopes are raised by faith in the efficacy of prayer, their chance of recovery is improved ; but if their hopes were equally raised by faith in the efficacy of medicinal remedies and careful nursing, their chance of recovery would be improved to an equal extent.

Those who only maintain the indirect effects of prayer for the sick must, if they are honest and logical, admit the correctness of the above argument. They may, indeed, urge that it will be a long time before people generally are sufficiently educated to admit of the substitution of scientific faith for faith in the supernatural—an argument closely resembling the very common protest against disturbing a religious faith, although demonstrably false, because its defenders believe it to be edifying. By such side issues inquirers are constantly being diverted from the consideration of simple questions of truth or falsity. In the present instance, no one desires to destroy the faith that gives hope to the patient and stimulates the energies of the doctors

and nurses, without giving an ample equivalent; and it is surely better that faith should rest directly upon the actual aids to recovery than upon a delusion that acts only through them.

But there is more to be said upon this alleged indirectly beneficial effect of prayer for the sick. It is admitted that in some instances faith in the efficacy of prayer may, in the way indicated, promote the recovery of the patients; but it is doubtful whether, on the whole, it is not more mischievous than useful. It is obvious that the persons whose energies are supposed to be stimulated by the faith have not the indirect theory in view, but believe in some heavenly influence that works in a way distinct from the natural action of medicines and attentions. To whatever extent, then, they trust in that external influence, is it not probable that to a corresponding extent they lack reliance upon the real means of cure? May not a nurse, for instance, worn out by constant watching, be inclined to persuade herself that prayer will take the place of unremitting attention to some extent, and to relax her watchfulness accordingly? Would she not, at any rate, more certainly be stimulated to do her utmost if she felt convinced that the patient's life depended entirely upon her unremitting attention, than if she trusted partially to the influence of prayer?

When the members of the deputation that waited upon Lord Palmerston, to ask for a day to be set apart for national prayer for the removal of the cholera, were told that they had better mind their drains, the advice was considered by most religious people to be impious. And, doubtless, even from the standpoint of those who only trust to the indirect effects of prayer, the advice was bad; for what could better stimulate the exertions of physicians and nurses, and the hopes of patients, than a special day of national prayer? Yet on the same ground as is above taken, it is fairly to be argued that a national prayer, and the faith in its efficacy,

would to some extent divert the attention of the people from the real means of assuaging the ravages of cholera, and preventing its outbreak in fresh places.

But those who protest against disturbing the faith in the efficacy of prayer for the sick, on the ground of its indirect influence, compose but a very small minority of the defenders of such prayers. A large majority of religious people in this country believe, with the Archbishop of York, that in the case of the recovery of the Prince of Wales a miracle was worked by God in answer to the prayers of the nation. It is needless to waste time in pointing out in detail the mischievous effects of such a superstition. They are sufficiently indicated in the case of the Peculiar People, who rely entirely upon a faith which others profess, but only partially trust to. Unfortunately a certain amount of encouragement has been given to the superstition by one who has done much to dissipate it. Professor Tyndall; in the *Contemporary Review* for October, has made the following strange admission:—"The theory that the system of nature is under the control of a Being who changes phenomena in compliance with the prayers of men, is, in my opinion, a perfectly legitimate one. It may, of course, be rendered futile by being associated with conceptions which contradict it; but such conceptions form no necessary part of the theory. It is a matter of experience that an earthly father, who is at the same time both wise and tender, listens to the requests of his children, and, if they do not ask amiss, takes pleasure in granting their requests. We know also that this compliance extends to the alteration, within certain limits, of the current of events upon earth. With this suggestion offered by our experience, it is no departure from scientific method to place behind natural phenomena a universal Father, who, in answer to the prayers of his children, alters the currents of those phenomena." A strange admission, truly, for

Professor Tyndall to make, affirming, as it does in effect, the *à priori* reasonableness of the theory of the Peculiar People themselves! For what is an alteration in the currents of phenomena but a miracle? And if we are told by one of the highest of our scientific authorities that there is nothing inherently unreasonable in the belief that the Divine Being will work miracles in answer to prayer, is it to be wondered at that the unscientific world should firmly believe in the theory? It is true that Professor Tyndall goes on to explain that, "without *verification*, a theoretic conception is a mere figment of the intellect;" and that "the region of theory, both in science and theology, lies behind the world of the senses; but the verification of theory lies in the sensible world. To check the theory, we have simply to compare the deductions from it with the facts of observation. If the deductions be in accordance with the facts, we accept the theory: if in opposition, the theory is given up." But this is just what the religious world will not do—compare their deductions with the facts of observation. These deductions are to them a sacred faith based on supernatural revelation, to put which to the test of scientific inquiry would, in their opinion, be a manifestation of impious doubt; and when they are told by one of the most distinguished of our men of science that there is nothing unreasonable in the theory that the grand order of the universe is liable to disturbance at the instigation of ignorant, foolish, shortsighted mortals, they cannot fail to feel strengthened in their faith. Science owes no allegiance to Religion; and it is time that the old rule of fashion, which has so long induced scientific explorers to preface their revelations with a deferential bow and a "By your leave, ma'am," to the reigning Theology of the period, should be broken through. With the greatest respect for Professor Tyndall, I all the more regret that he has made an admission which I cannot help regarding as an amiable little offering in the Temple of Rimmon.

The admirable article from the proposer of the hospital test, that also appeared in the *Contemporary Review* for October, amply sustains the dignity of Science. The following fine passage well represents the true devoutness of the scientific mind :—" There is no influence so soothing, none so reconciling to the chequered conditions of life, as consciousness of the absolute stability of the rock on which the physicist takes his stand ; who, knowing the intelligent order that pervades the universe, believes in it, and, with true filial piety, would never suggest a petition for a change in the Great Will as touching any childish whim of his own. I cannot express my repugnance at the notion that supreme intelligence and wisdom can be influenced by the suggestion of any human mind, however great. It is thus that we may breathe the true spirit of communion with the Unseen, here realise a sense of dependence upon that which is too great to be moved, and gladly cherish submission to the only mastership found to be unchanging and sufficing. Here the physicist fears no catastrophe—regards calmly all that happens, whatever it may be, as the outcome of the forces that exist. His work, and the work of all men—the only work that satisfies and endures—is the finding and maintaining of truth so far as he knows it, freely giving equal licence to every other man to do the same. Comparing, as we do at this moment, our observations and experience, and in the clash of thought evoking truth, victory for whichever side matters not to him, since it surely will in the end be for the side of truth. For the future he has no anxiety : the supreme order in which he has a place and work cannot fail to provide, and he submits, without suggesting limits or a definition to the plan he never could have devised and cannot compass—too glad to believe that all such order is not to be influenced by human interference."

The same writer ably enlarges upon the recognised

fact that the province of prayer has contracted with the advance of knowledge. He places the phenomena of the universe in two classes: class 1 consisting of those for which, or for the alteration of which, prayer would be considered useless, and class 2 of those concerning which prayer is considered to be availing, and he points out how, since the early ages of human existence, class 1 has become larger as knowledge has advanced; and class 2 has lost what class 1 has gained. As uncertainties are changed by investigation into certainties, men by general consent cease to pray about them. Thus we see that the phenomena with which the exact sciences have to do, are generally held to be out of the province of prayer, whilst events of the sequence of which our ignorance renders us less certain are held to be within that province. For instance, no rational and educated person would think of praying that the sun should always be visible in England, whilst, on the other hand, we have recently had prayers for fine weather offered up in our churches for several Sundays. If we knew as much about meteorology as we know about astronomy, no educated man would be guilty of such absurdity. Similarly it is to be observed that if the laws which govern the progress of disease under given conditions were, as perhaps they never will be, as well known as the laws of chemistry, we should not see men of learning and intelligence coming forward to defend by elaborate arguments the offering of prayers for the sick.

Perhaps the most plausible argument put forward by the defenders of the direct effects of prayer, is that prayer has its place in the natural order of phenomena. This view has been ably stated by Dr M'Cosh in the "Contemporary Review" for October 1872. Dr M'Cosh does not believe "that God usually answers prayer by violating or even changing His own laws," but that "He commonly answers prayer by natural means appointed for this purpose from the very begin-



ning, when He gave to mind and matter their laws, and arranged the objects with these laws for the accomplishment of His wise and beneficent ends, for the encouragement of virtue and the discouragement of vice, and among others to provide an answer to the acceptable petitions of His people." In illustration of this argument, Dr M'Cosh proceeds to urge,—“God, in answer to prayer, may restore the patient by an original strength of constitution, or by the well-timed application of a remedy. The two, the prayer and its answer, were in the very counsel of God, and if there had not been the one there would not have been the other.” Here the recovery of the patient is in effect represented as a predestined event dependent upon a prayer also predestined, and prompted by God, as Dr M'Cosh afterwards states. This theory certainly avoids the objections commonly made to the idea that Divine benefits, even those of the greatest importance to humanity, are dependent upon the caprice of mortals, but it only does so by virtually denying the spontaneity of prayer. I question whether the majority of Dr M'Cosh's co-believers will be inclined to accept this issue. But in any case the theory is a pure assumption without a tittle of real evidence to sustain it. Dr M'Cosh does not distinctly tell us in what way men are prompted to offer these predestined prayers. He does indeed say,—“The believer is in need of a blessing, and he asks it, and he finds that the God who created the need and prompted the prayer has provided the means of granting what he needs.” But it seems obvious that this sense of need is not the Divine prompting referred to, because every one admits that many prayers offered by believers for supposed blessings that they feel the need of, are not answered, and I cannot suppose that Dr M'Cosh would maintain that God prompts men to offer prayers which He does not intend to answer. As far as we are acquainted with the natural order of mundane arrangements, a special

prompting of particular individuals to pray for certain benefits that the Supreme Being had determined to bestow, would be as miraculous as the suspension of the law of gravitation or any other physical law, simply because we *know* of no *direct* communication between the Divine and the human mind. We know so little of the laws of mind that it is impossible to prove that no such communication exists, nor can we fairly be called upon to prove the negative: it is for Dr M'Cosh and those who agree with him to prove the affirmative proposition. But if on the one hand it is impossible to prove that any specified inducement to pray is not a Divine prompting, on the other hand, it is equally impossible to prove that it is. No man can *know* that any prompting which he is conscious of is a Divine prompting: he can only *believe* it to be so, and he is at least as likely as not to be deceiving himself. If it be asked why I should take pains to throw doubt upon the theory advanced by Dr M'Cosh amongst others, I reply because I am convinced that belief in it tends to reduce the strength of human effort, which I believe to be the only divinely ordained prayer (in the sense of "*laborare est orare.*") Those who completely believe that they are prompted by God to pray for any benefit which will therefore certainly be granted, cannot help relaxing their efforts to obtain it in a degree exactly proportionate to their faith in the Divine action.

The Rev. William Knight in an admirable paper entitled, "The Function of prayer in the Economy of the Universe," published in the Contemporary Review for January 1873, presents us with an eloquent defence of prayer, in some respects similar to that of Dr M'Cosh, but by no means identical with it. After admitting that—"No one, even slightly acquainted with scientific methods and results, can for a moment brook the idea of any interference with the laws of external nature, produced by prayer;" that—"This conception of the absolute fixity of physical law is one which the



progress of science has made axiomatic ;” and that—“It is vain to reply that we are continually interfering with the seemingly fixed laws of the universe, and altering their destination by our voluntary activities,” &c. ; for “We are ourselves a part of the physical cosmos, and in accordance with its laws, we exert a power which changes external nature”—Mr Knight proceeds to refer to the common idea that the weather is a proper subject for prayer, because apparently capricious. This idea he clearly shows to be illogical. He declares that it is just as unreasonable to pray for rain, &c., as against the regular return of the seasons, or to-morrow’s sunrise, which people never pray against, because they know such prayers would be contrary to God’s will as revealed in the laws of external nature. But although Mr Knight denies the usefulness of prayers for the abrogation or suspension of any of the physical laws, however little they may be known, he agrees with Dr M’Cosh and other writers, who like Mr M’Grigor Allan in the *Examiner*, have taken part in the recent controversy, that prayer for the Divine influence upon and instruction to the mind or spiritual nature of man, is reasonable and effectual. In reference to prayer for the removal of a calamity, Mr Knight says :—“Now, so far as it can be obviated or lessened by human action, prudence, foresight, and conformity to the laws of nature, man may validly pray to be enabled to put forth that foresight and sagacity, and to conform to those laws.” But that—“In so far as the disaster is due to causes with which he (man) cannot interfere, it is illegitimate in him to pray for their removal. His obvious duty then is to acquiesce in the will of the Supreme. If he prays, as he should, it must be simply for the spirit of submission.” “Even in the former case,” Mr Knight continues, “it is only indirectly that he may pray for the removal of a pestilence. He may ask for wisdom to cope with it, for a knowledge of the laws of health, and for ability to conform to these : in-

asmuch as unconscious aid is often vouchsafed to the will of the agent who is striving to observe them." I quote thus at length from Mr Knight, and shall probably quote from him again, because he has written the best defence of prayer that influences, not the man praying only, but the Being prayed to, that I have ever read. I differ from him in this respect, that whilst he evidently believes that prayer influences God to give some special moral incentive, and even intellectual instruction to man, and that the act of praying itself exercises a useful influence upon the man who prays (and perhaps upon others who hear, even if they do not also join in the prayer), I admit only the latter result. We have seen that Mr Knight thinks it unreasonable in people to believe that because the weather is apparently capricious—that is because we know so little of meteorology—therefore prayer for rain or fine weather is rational, whereas prayer for the inversion of the order of the seasons, would be accounted by the same people to be absurd, and even impious, as being obviously contrary to the will of God as declared in the laws of nature. Now to me it seems equally illogical to argue as Mr Knight virtually does, that because the laws of mind are apparently capricious—that is, because we know so little of psychology—therefore it is reasonable to pray that God will specially instruct the intellectual faculties, or influence the moral sentiments of a man, whereas (Mr Knight admits) it would be unreasonable to pray for Divine interference with physical sequences. But we will hear Mr Knight again upon this point:—

“We pray for a friend’s life that seems endangered. Such prayer can never be an influential element in arresting the physical course of disease by one iota. But it *may* bring a fresh suggestion to the mind of a physician, or other attendant, to adopt a remedy which by natural means ‘turns the tide’ of ebbing life, and determines the recovery of the patient. Or we pray

for the removal of a pestilence, and the answer is given within the minds and hearts of those who take means to check it or uproot it."

Now we have no more evidence in support of the idea that "suggestions" are conveyed to the minds of physicians in answer to prayer, than we have that medicines certain to cure the patients are placed in their hands by superhuman agency. As far as we know, theories of treatment are just as much dependent upon unaided human thought, as medicines are upon unaided human manufacture. It seems to me as reasonable to suppose that an Englishman going out to China as a missionary, would obtain Divine instruction in the Chinese language in answer to prayer, as that a physician should from the same source and through the same agency receive suggestions as to the cure of disease. It is true that a sudden thought often flashes a great discovery upon the mind, and from the suddenness, men are apt to regard it as an inspiration or intuition; but sudden discoveries occur in relation to the acquisition of languages as well as in medical science; and it is an unwarrantable deduction to assume that because we cannot always distinctly trace the parentage of a sudden idea, it is therefore any more an exception to the ordinary regularity of the physical laws, than the simplest perception common to humanity or the lower animals.

That I have not mistaken Mr Knight's meaning when he speaks of the "suggestions" above referred to is obvious from the following quotation from his paper. If he had only contended that by means of prayer, the physician's mind may be concentrated and his energies strengthened in an unusual degree, so that he will be more likely to think and act effectively in endeavouring to cure his patient, I should have agreed with him entirely. This is what is meant by the "reflex action" of prayer, a result—and the only result of prayer which has been conclusively proved by common experience.

But Mr Knight means something quite different when he says :—

“ Had we no free spiritual power within us differentiating us from surrounding existence, we could not ‘come into’ God’s presence in the act of devotion ; for surely in that presence man, as well as unconscious nature, always stands. But endowed with intelligence and spiritual freedom, he may, by an act either of the will, or by simple aspiration, present his spirit to the Divine, withdrawing it from the sphere of the sensuous, and subjecting it to the influence of the super-sensible. And the Divine nature may then act upon the human, to quicken and melt, directly ‘enduing it with power from on high.’ ”

Mr Knight gives us a more complete key to his belief in the following eloquent passage :—“ In the conscious freedom of our own wills we recognise a power, irreducible by analysis, which proclaims our superiority to the links of physical causation, while it acts in unbroken harmony with these. It testifies that in our inmost essence we are not the mere products of organising force, but that we have (to use the Kantian terms) natures *noumenally* free, and therefore, *noumenally* related to God. The sphere of prayer is, therefore, the life of the creature endowed with moral freedom and the capacities of spiritual growth. Its value to the individual consists in the impulse it conveys to the inmost energies of the soul in their ascent and progress. By a direct divine afflatus it tends, when it is, in Pauline phrase, ‘prayer with the spirit and with the understanding also,’ to clarify the intellect, and to elevate the heart, to rectify the bias of the passions, to strengthen the conscience, and discipline the will, and to foster all the virtues. Are *these* results to be slighted because the power which effects them is inoperative in external nature? In that outer region all is orderly and fair. But in the region of the spiritual, there is conscious disorder, moral chaos,

which is at once an evidence of the need, and a vindication of the reasonableness of an interference with it." In this passage we have another illustration of the fact that the realm of prayer is coterminous with the realm of ignorance: or, in the words of a writer before quoted from—"that what a man will pray for depends precisely on the extent of his intelligent acquaintance with the phenomena around and within him." We know a great deal about the region of external nature, and there Mr Knight admits that prayer is not directly operative. We know little of the "region of the spiritual," and that therefore is the proper sphere of prayer. In the former region Mr Knight sees that "all is orderly and fair," and he thinks that prayer for interference in it is irrational; in the latter, he does *not* see that all is orderly and fair, but believes that he sees "conscious disorder" and "moral chaos," from which he concludes that interference is both reasonable and necessary.

Professor F. W. Newman, in his recently published pamphlet, "The Controversy about Prayer" (Thos. Scott) supports views almost identical with those of Mr Knight. He deprecates "stereotype prayer," and prayer made to order. He also protests against the vain repetitions so common in our churches, and often uttered in a hurried and unthinking manner. Like Mr Knight, he renounces the idea that prayer can alter the arrangements of the material universe. He says, "Undoubtedly, the received belief of old was that God's providence ruled the world by agencies from without. A pious saint in danger from enemies was imagined to pray for (perhaps) 'twelve legions of angels,' as a military aid. A prophet's eyes were opened to see chariots and horses, invisible to other mortals, fighting on the side of his people. To such a mental condition the prayer of those days adjusted itself. But now all thoughtful persons, educated in England, are aware that the Divine rule is carried on

by the laws of the material universe, and by the agencies of the human mind; and as it is no longer admissible to entreat that [the Most High will tamper with his own laws, prayer tends to concentrate itself upon the human mind,—that is, invokes influence from the Divine Spirit on the mind either of him who prays, or of some others." Professor Newman believes that the will as well as the mind can be influenced by prayer, and I agree with him; but I do not believe, as he does, if I mistake not, that the influence is external to the mind and will, or, in other words, a direct action of the Divine upon the human spirit.

To reply to Mr Strange's pamphlet, "Communion with God," (Thos. Scott) and other publications upon this controversy, would involve a recapitulation of many of the above objections, which appear to me to be sufficient. I will therefore conclude with a few remarks upon the reflex action of prayer, which, as I have before stated, I believe to be its only effect.

No one denies that earnest prayer exercises an influence upon the person who prays, and, in the case of public prayer, of those also who listen to, even if they do not sensibly join in, the prayer. At least, no one who has ever prayed in earnest for a worthy purpose, can have failed to feel that influence. Dr Littledale has declared that prayer offered with no other end in view than that which is now indicated, is little better than "a fit of voluntary hysterics;" but the sarcasm is unjust. A man who devoutly believes in the existence of a Father of the Universe, whose arrangements are so perfect that they cannot be altered in accordance with the foolish whims of His children, is certainly no more denied the right of communion with Him, than is one who ostensibly prays for the sake of what he can get. The noblest type of prayer is not the beggar's petition: it is rather the child's embrace. The fable of the digging of Æsop's orchard for a treasure supposed to be hidden there has been more than once referred to



in the present controversy. The treasure was found, but it was not that which was sought. It was a treasure of a more permanent kind than a bag of gold ; it was the treasure of an invaluable lesson of industry learned, and rewarded by the fertility of the soil as the natural result. Just so I believe that prayer is answered, not by an external and temporary Divine impetus to good intention, earnest will, or noble effort, but by an internal and permanent strengthening and ennobling of the soul, that comes naturally from the exercise of our highest mental efforts and moral aspirations.

It may be truly said that this view contracts the province of prayer within the narrowest boundaries, but they are boundaries which include what the deepest religious feeling recognizes as its highest function ; boundaries, too, that are defensible, and, indeed, on a Theistic basis, impregnable. To the anti-theist, of course, there is no province of prayer. He may object that such results of prayer as are above referred to as actual, would be just as likely to be brought about by earnest self-communion and reflection, or by sympathetic converse with a friend, as if the confessions and aspirations were addressed in the form of a prayer to an unseen being. I admit the full force of this objection, which I have often felt ; but I think that to any one who believes, however vaguely, in the existence of a Being of infinite wisdom and goodness, an obvious reply will suggest itself. Even if it be admitted, for the sake of argument, that there is no such thing as a religious instinct, there is at least a natural craving for perfect sympathy. Now, there is never *perfect* sympathy between two human beings. To no human friend, however dear, can we talk as unre-servedly as we can think and feel—

“ For if one soul in perfect sympathy  
Beat with another, answering love for love,  
Weak mortals all entranced on earth would be.”

But we can pray, at least silently, with a freedom as unrestrained as the thoughts and desires of our minds. The Divine Being is to us the infinite personification of our purest ideal. We may believe in an indefinite way that He is also infinitely more than this, but it is as this that we pray to Him. Prayer, then, in its highest, purest, and, as I think, its only useful form, consists in a yearning after the loftiest ideal.