

CT 149

PRACTICAL REMARKS
ON
"THE LORD'S PRAYER."

BY A LAYMAN.

WITH
ANNOTATIONS BY A DIGNITARY OF THE
CHURCH OF ENGLAND.



"Be not rash with thy mouth, neither let thy heart be hasty to put forth a word before the Elohim; for the Elohim is in heaven and thou on the earth, therefore let thy words be few."—ECCLESIASTES.

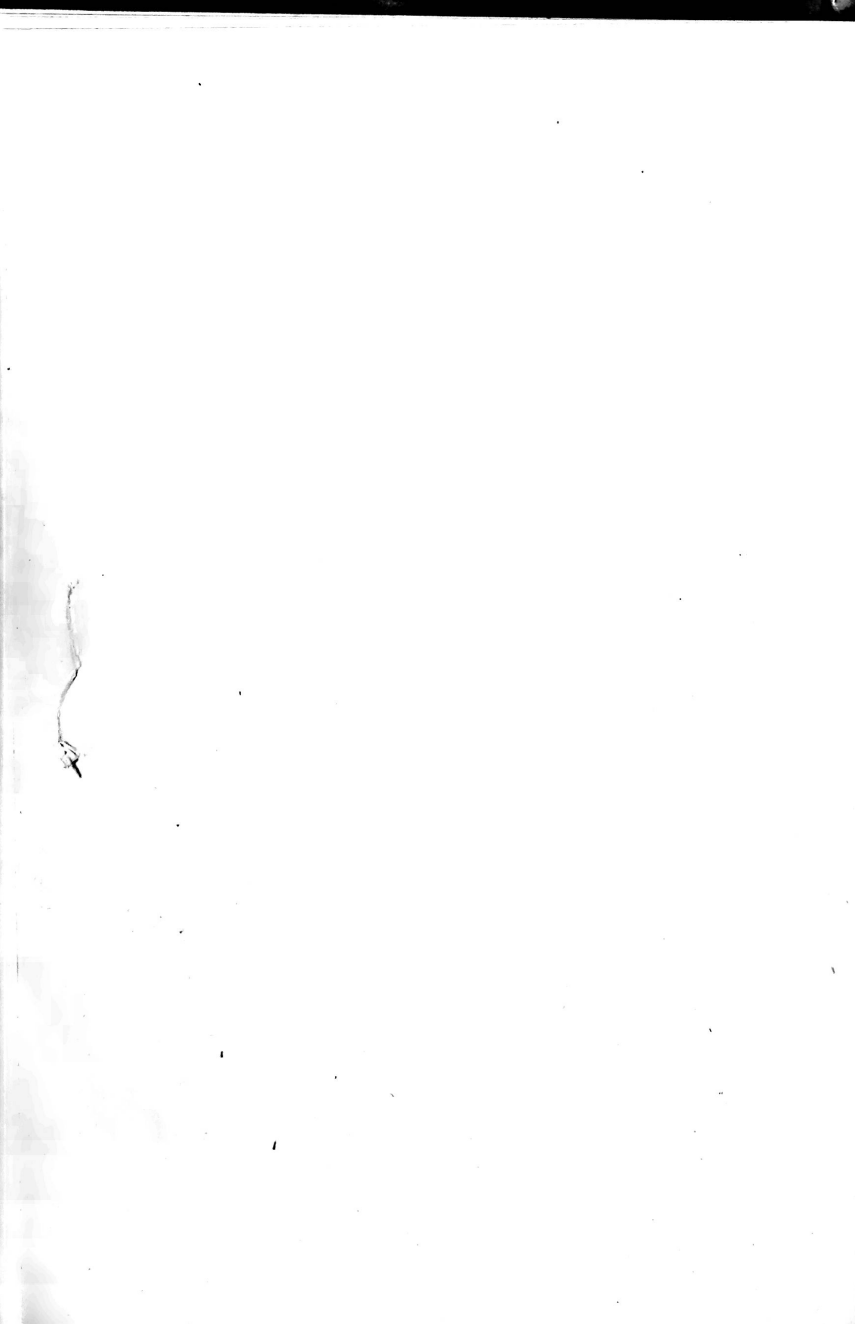
"When ye multiply prayer I do not hear."—ISAIAH.

"Make not much babbling when thou prayest."—ECCLESIASTICUS.

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“THE LORD’S PRAYER.”

IN Matthew vi., 5-8, Jesus warns his disciples neither to imitate the hypocrites who pray at the corners of the streets, *that they may be seen of men*, nor the heathen, *who think that they shall be heard for their much speaking*. This was, in effect, to pass beforehand the most severe yet truthful criticism on two modes of prayer greatly in use among orthodox Christians of the present day.^a In publicity and repetition, have they not left far behind them, both hypocrites

^a THE CENSURE PRONOUNCED BY JESUS ON THOSE WHO PRAYED IN PUBLIC.—The censure must have been intended to apply, not to public *congregational* prayer, but to the parading before the public *individual, personal*, prayer; for the prayer he taught his disciples is a joint prayer, and, therefore, a prayer to be used in public. I wish that we had two words for *congregational* and *individual* prayer; for, to address God in a form of words prescribed for us is a very different thing from addressing to him our own thoughts and feelings in our own language. This last only is, strictly speaking, *praying*; the former may, no doubt, on special occasions, so harmonise with the frame of mind in which a member of a congregation happens to be, as to become his prayer; but its common and almost universal character is that of a religious rite. Its justification is, the necessity of a religious body assembling, from time to time, and its being appropriate for such assemblings. It may be observed that numbers (may I not say nearly all?) except on occasions of strong emotion, although desirous of praying,—*i.e.*, of addressing God in words of their own, expressive of what they think and feel,—are incapable of doing so. I was once requested by a clergyman,—a sensible, well-informed, and pious man,—to give him a form for his private devotions, which would have been like a schoolboy’s letter written to his parents under his master’s dictation. Length and repetition are, no doubt, censurable, and were censured by our Lord.

and heathen? After this good caution and advice, Jesus gives to his disciples the celebrated form called "The Lord's Prayer."

What an idiot we should take that man to be who, having a favour to ask, repeated his request over and over again, in the very same terms. Would the case be less absurd if, instead of addressing his request to man, he addressed it to God? On the contrary, it would be still more so, for we might hope to obtain from a man, by sheer importunity, some favour he would have refused to a single request. while there could be no hope of inducing God to concede to wearisome iteration what he would refuse to the first simple petition. Were it otherwise, the people of Thibet and Mongolia are far wiser in their generation than are many orthodox Christians, who yet look on the Asiatic plan for unceasing prayer only as a subject for laughter. These people, firmly impressed with the idea of the immense importance of continual prayer, make revolving wheels, which are covered with forms of prayer, and keep these wheels in constant movement; the rolling action gives *volubility* to the prayer far beyond anything they could do unassisted by the machinery.

Compared with many others, "The Lord's Prayer" has at least the merit of brevity, but when closely examined is found to contain many fair subjects for criticism. A twofold interpretation for several clauses of this prayer is possible. We first take that interpretation which actually prevails amongst orthodox Christians, and which they, not unjustly, maintain to be countenanced by other precepts of Jesus, and representations in the Bible. We shall after it deal with the other interpretation, and make such remarks as it suggests.

"Our Father"—The idea, which represents God

as the universal Father, is no less beautiful than true, and had the idea been always present to the mind of orthodox Christians, their religion would not have been disfigured by so many cruel dogmas, nor tarnished by so many crimes.

The address entitles God, Our Father "which art in heaven"—or rather, "who art in the heavens."^b

^b OUR FATHER *which art in Heaven*.—The $\delta \ \epsilon \nu \ \tau \acute{o} \iota \varsigma \ \delta \upsilon \rho \alpha \nu \acute{o} \iota \varsigma$, must, I think, have been a gloss, explanatory of $\pi \acute{\alpha} \tau \epsilon \rho \ \acute{\eta} \mu \acute{\omega} \nu$. There is, however, something like it in Luke x. 21, where Jesus is represented, in addressing his Father, as using, not the vocative, but the nominative $\delta \ \pi \alpha \tau \acute{\eta} \rho$, as if it were customary so to use a recognised title of God. However this may be, a prevalent idea conveyed by the "which art in Heaven" has been, as you observe, that of a local habitation, and this among both Jews and Christians. Yet some, even of the Jews, must have derived a truer conception of the Deity and his mode of existence, if from no other source, from Solomon's words on the dedication of their Temple,—“The Heaven and Heaven of Heavens cannot contain thee, how much less this house which I have builded” (1 Kings viii. 27). What does the word Heaven mean when God is said to be *in Heaven*? I should say that it is a *positive* expression with a *negative* signification,—not on earth, not local, not dependent for existence on matter, space, time. God is known to us in his *absolute* nature only by negatives, in his *relative* nature by the results of his agency, including specially our own human fabric. Herein consists the difficulty of addressing him; which it is hard to do without substituting some positive idea for the negative; and not only of addressing him, but of loving him, fearing him, reverencing him. Hence, too, the tendency to idolatry even in those who are convinced that God is not a material object. Hence, again, the question whether (setting aside revealed commands) it is designed that we should pray to him, love him, reverence him. My reply is,—The promptings of our nature, innate aspirations (apart from all reasoning) to do these things, are his implanting, his agency; and compliance with them has, therefore, his sanction. To believe that there is such a Being is inseparable from the desire to make some effort to hold communion with him, and to hope for some response; to cultivate appropriate feelings towards him, and to hope for something corresponding to them from him. Our reasoning faculty, likewise the result of his agency, and so carrying with it his sanction to exercise it on these very tendencies, puts stringent limitations on them, checks and directs them, and especially teaches us to hesitate in determining what is accomplished by prayer to God, loving him, reverencing him, &c., all of which is at once *unreasonable* and *natural*. In this our intellectual nature bows to our moral nature; yet not so as to relinquish its control over it. Both are of God; and the perfect reconciliation of the two

These words, though capable of an unblamable and instructive exposition, yet if accepted (as generally) in connection with prevalent biblical views, mischievously localise the abode of God.

Heaven is here understood to be a local region, like Earth; a region where the Most High sits on a sapphire throne, and holds a court or levée in State of those ministers without whose agency, it seems, he is as much mutilated and inefficient, as a king without messengers and civil servants. Origen was aware of the mean ideas which *Heaven* here carried to the popular mind, and refused to accept the phrase in its ordinary acceptation.

The modern Christian, enlightened by the astronomy of Kepler and Newton, and by the philosophy of Anaxagoras and Cicero, looks up to "Heaven" in his devotions, not as a special locality, but as the actual Universe, embracing Earth on all sides, as a petty point lost in its immensity, and elevates his conception of God by the vast distance of the stars: so that, to our philosophic mind, God in Heaven means God omnipresent, God dwelling in the entire Universe.

But is it reasonable to suppose that, if Jesus had held such a view, he would have taken no pains to enlighten his followers? It is rather to be feared that the meaning of God in Heaven, prevalent in the bible and among the Christian vulgar, was the sense intended by Jesus.

"Hallowed be thy name." ^c—It might seem that

expressions of his will in this matter would seem to be among those reserved points of knowledge which are at present beyond our comprehension, such as the *positive* of eternity, the *positive* of infinity, uncreated existence, the co-existence of God and Evil, of Creation and Eternity.

^c HALLOWED BE *thy name*.—Was not "name" *shem* an established expression for any special revelation made by God of himself? So, among numerous instances, it is used in Exodus iii. 13, vi. 3. It is in this sense I understand it here, the hallowing being a hallowing of God

this speaks one sense, one only; and that, a sense to which every reverential mind bows assent. But was this really what Jesus intended? Unbiassed inquiry shows that the whole prayer is in closest conformity with the notions and precepts of the contemporary Rabbis. It is therefore more reasonable to believe that here also Jesus intended what they intended, when they inculcated reverence for the sacred NAME. They would not utter the name Jehovah *at all*, but superstitiously altered it into the words which mean Lord, in Hebrew and in Greek. Modern Christians have propagated the confusion thus introduced, so that God, Jehovah, Master, and Sir are alike possible interpretations of the Greek *kurios*; to the great convenience of Trinitarian disputants, and great darkening of the Scriptures. It is to be feared that Jesus, since he nowhere points at this error of the national teachers, did but recommend and intensify a scruple which had in it more of sanctimoniousness than of reverence. In Ecclus. xxiii. 9, we find, "Use not thyself to the naming of the Holy One." Do orthodox Christians ever reflect on the number of times they use the Holy name in their ordinary forms, whether of worship or of state? Those to whom this command was addressed would not even write the name of the Holy One.

"Thy kingdom come." ^d—No one can imagine that

revealed to us as "Our Father;" embracing in the term the idea of what may be designated a Patriarchal sovereignty, and connected, therefore, with the clauses of the prayer immediately following.

^d **THY KINGDOM COME.**—It must certainly mean something yet to come so long as the prayer is used. Your suggestion that it might have been taken from a Rabbinical form is probably right; but the Rabbinical form itself must have had its origin in Daniel ii. 44. In the Lord's Prayer it implies that Jesus had only announced and prepared mankind for the perfect establishment of the promised kingdom, which will take place at his second coming. This event the early Christians looked for as "at hand." What did he mean by telling his disciples, when shortly before his death he was partaking of the wine at supper with them,

there was originality in this prayer. Of course, the thought was familiar to the prophets, that an overthrow of the heathen monarchies was shortly to come, and a righteous rule on earth to be established under the saints of the Most High. This rule was called the kingdom of God. That the heart of man should long for this, is of course right; and longing leads to aspiration. But can it be denied, that under this prayer is conveyed the false and mischievous notion, that hitherto God *has not governed* on earth,—that the heathen nations were ruled over by devils or by Satan, God's enemy,—that God is ever going to rule, and ever disappointing and postponing our hope? A philosophic Christian of Germany sees "*God in history*;" but can any one pretend that in this prayer, or anywhere else, Jesus so taught his disciples to look on the actual history of the world? We do not see very clearly what this petition means. The kingdom of God, whether we wish for it or not, always was, is, and will be, "come"; it is as necessarily past and present, as future. If by "thy kingdom," another life is understood, it is a wish in which there is nothing to blame, though our wishes are equally powerless to hasten or to retard it. Perhaps that "kingdom" which Jesus led his followers to believe would be realised by him on earth, soon after his death, is meant here; that kingdom which orthodox Christians are still waiting for more than eighteen

that he would not again taste wine until he drank it *new* with them in "my Father's kingdom?" He may have been speaking figuratively of a future state after death; but the more obvious and likely interpretation of the words is that he would soon return to renew his intercourse with them in the future kingdom on earth. The petition in the prayer admits of another application, although I hardly think one which was intended. The human race is clearly moving on to some changes, as great, perhaps, and as gradual, as those physical changes which have brought the earth to its present improved condition. The result may be a coming of "God's kingdom," not through any change of the Divine Ruler's rule, but in the perfect recognition of it by his human subjects.

hundred years after his death. The Jews have a prayer called "Kaddish," a word signifying sanctification,—the prayer is in the Chaldee language, and is supposed to be as old as the time of the captivity. Did Jesus take this phrase from the old Jewish prayer? The ancient Jewish writings furnish parallels to every other phrase in it. Perhaps, then, we may take these passages, "hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come," as a reproduction of an old Jewish thought, and an expression of hope of the coming of the Messiah. Be this as it may, the Jewish prayer is still in daily use, and is as follows: "May His great name be magnified and sanctified throughout the world which He hath created according to his own good pleasure; may He establish His kingdom while ye live, in your days especially, even time quickly coming. Amen."

"Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven."^e—The general sense of this is identical with "Thy kingdom come." It adds the somewhat gratuitous idea that Sin is not incident to the heavenly world, although, according to the traditionary belief, Sin did break out in heaven itself with an intensity so awful, that (at least according to the doctrine now universal) no Redemption was attempted, and no Person of the Trinity devoted himself to recover the rebellious angels. But pass this by, and let us dwell on another side of the prayer. Has not a vicious, morbid Resignation

^e **THY WILL BE DONE, IN EARTH, AS IN HEAVEN.**—This is, apparently, an expansion of the preceding clause, and explains what is meant by the coming of God's kingdom, in a manner which accords well with the meaning last suggested. What is told us of fallen angels is not, I think, inconsistent with the desire that God's will may, some day, be as perfectly observed on earth as it now is in heaven; but rather suggests an analogy between the two—heaven as it once was, and earth as it is now. The prayer would thus be that, as in heaven, when its rebellious sinners were exiled, God's will became perfectly recognised, so it may be on earth, when earth's sinners shall be banished.

prevailed among Christians, as a result of intended submission to the will of God? Have they not been taught to regard as God's will, not only things naturally inevitable, but also that which is nothing but the fruit of human folly? To practise resignation to this as to the will of God is decidedly immoral.

"Give us this day our daily bread."^f This does not differ much from Prov. xxx., 8, 9, but it contains an epithet which, without any cause, is translated *daily*. The Greek is *epiousios*, a word unknown to the Greek classics. There is but one analysis of it, which the analogy of the Greek language permits, viz., that which Professor Renan points out. In the New Testament the word *epiousa* habitually means "the morrow;" in Attic Greek it is "the on-coming" (day). From this the adjective *epiousios* is legitimately derivable, which gives to this clause the sense, "Give us this day *to-morrow's* bread." (See Liddell and Scott's Greek Lexicon, p. 491.) Renan asserts that this very prayer is to be found among Jewish formulas. If Jesus taught his disciples so to pray, he taught a lesson widely different and wiser than when he bade them to take no thought for the morrow. Christians in general, on the contrary, interpret this clause by his precept which follows

^f GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD.—The right rendering of *ἐπιούσιον* is "sufficient." I understand the clause, too, not as asking God for the day's sustenance, independently of those exertions through which it has been provided, or is yet to be procured, but as acknowledging that he is still, and not the less, the giver of it, having created that which becomes food for us, and endowed us with those faculties through which we are enabled to procure it,—that he is the sustainer of our life, through whatever fixed laws of our nature and of the world he accomplishes his benevolent and fatherly purpose. Daily experience would teach the disciples that he did not otherwise give them daily bread. NOTE.—See 'Bishop Hinds's Free Discussion of Sacred Topics,' Part II., p. 93, where the meaning of the word is determined from its relation to *περιούσιος*, and the analogy of other words similarly compounded of *ἐπί* and *περί*.

presently in this same sermon on the Mount, and understand that we are to be satisfied with *to-day's* bread. The result of such doctrine is counteracted by homely common sense; nevertheless, the tendency of the religion has been to deprecate active exertion for worldly good. If we can learn to discriminate between the wiser and the less wise, the fanatical and the spiritual, of the books called inspired, we may at length accept from Jesus the prayer for to-morrow's bread, if that be the real sense of his words.

“Forgive us our trespasses *as* we forgive them that trespass against us.”^g There are more ways than one of reading this petition. First, if we take the version in Luke as our exposition, Jesus says: “Forgive us our sins, FOR *even we* (*kai gar hemeis*) forgive those who offend us” That is to say, the sinner (holding himself up as a pattern to his Maker), remonstrates with his heavenly Lord, — “Surely,

^g FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES *as* WE FORGIVE THEM THAT TRESPASS AGAINST US.—Agreeing with you in interpreting this clause as an acknowledgment that those who ask to be forgiven ought to be forgiving, I do not look at its moral bearing in the same light. What is expressed as true of our forgiving is, according to Gospel teaching, equally true of repentance, faith, and other requirements. The assertion of it in the prayer would seem to be owing, not only to the opposition between this portion of our conduct and the forgiveness we seek, but to the fact that neither Jews nor Gentiles regarded it as any part of a good moral life. Its prominence in our Lord's teaching, and the strong language which he uses about it, is fairly attributable to this peculiarity, without supposing that it has more to do with our forgiveness, in the Gospel scheme, than other portions of a good life. That the expectation of obtaining forgiveness thus destroys the essence of good moral conduct, which ought to be practised for its own sake, involves us in a question which divided heathen as much as it has Christian moralists. In our own literature we have Butler, &c., on one side, and Paley, &c., on the other. The correct view, as it appears to me, is that the hope of reward may, but does not necessarily, exclude the love of virtue for its own sake, or debase the motive which directs us to it. To give a homely illustration: A man marries a woman because he loves and esteems her; but is well pleased to know that she

O Lord, thou canst not be less generous to me than I am to my fellow-men," which, though an excellent argument in a philosophic thesis (and overwhelming against the Christian hell), is not in a tone at all suitable to prayer, even though it be found in the Gospel of Luke. But in Matthew vi. 14, 15, the clause is put in a different light. There Jesus says that, according as we *do* or *do not* forgive our enemies, God *will* or *will not* forgive us. Hence he makes us pray, "Forgive us (or not), according as we forgive (or do not forgive)." It is hard to admire or to imitate a prayer so couched. Truly a heart utterly free from malice, and desiring every enemy to be converted to God, to goodness, and to true happiness, is such a heart as will find pardon and peace with God. None the less is the same likely to shrink from a prayer, that it may be dealt with as it deals with others. Nor is it elevating to any soul, rather it is debasing, to urge, "Judge not, *that ye may not be judged* ; or, forgive, *that ye may be forgiven*." It rather teaches laxity and self-seeking under the guise of religion. It turns the mind from doing (as Aristotle teaches) good because it is good, and sets one on thinking, What we are to *get* by goodness.

"Lead us not into temptation."^h If we take this

brings him a large fortune, or the advantage of influential relatives, who may promote his worldly interest. He would have married her all the same had she possessed none of these worldly recommendations; but he does not the less value them.

^h LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION; BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL. —It is true, as you observe, that temptation is our appointed lot as free agents. Still temptation is a danger from which we naturally shrink, and as naturally express our dread of it by praying to God so to order our path of life that we may be spared trials which may prove too strong for us; and this notwithstanding that trial is inseparable from our condition, and notwithstanding also that the Divine Providence is exercised by general laws. So prayed Jesus, "Father, save me from this hour; but for this cause came I unto this hour." No prayer—

to the letter, it is a request that God would suppress the very conditions of our freedom; those moral trials through which we may raise ourselves to the dignity of beings who, having gained a painful victory, merit reward. To have no temptations, to know no evil and, consequently, no good, is the state of moral innocence of the animal creation and the infant at the breast. But such innocence is not virtue. Virtue consists in overcoming temptation; still we must never expose ourselves needlessly or out of pure bravado to opportunities for evil doing, although virtue cannot exist without experience of resistance. And note here the inconsistency of the New Testament to itself. The Apostle James, i. 2, 12, 13, assures us that God tempts no one; which may seem to supersede a prayer that he will not lead us into temptation. But what is far worse, the whole book, the whole Christian scheme is pervaded by the frightful notion that the just and compassionate "Father in Heaven" lets loose upon weak, inexperienced men and children a subtle rebel angel, a tempter well versed in all our weakness, and occupied day and night in seducing us. Luke might bid us to pray, "Let not Satan tempt us, FOR *even we* deal not thus with our children."

"Deliver us from evil."—From what evil? The evil we ourselves do? This is to ask God to act in our place, to do our work for us when he has given us all that is necessary for doing it well ourselves. Is it from the evil which we believe he permits the devil to urge us to do, that we pray to be delivered? But it would be simpler and far more reasonable to believe that God permits nothing so detestable. Is it from the physical evil attached to our nature?

indeed, not the simplest ejaculation—is free from this objection of inconsistency. As I have before remarked, praying is at once natural and unreasonable.

But this is to ask God both to give us the victory without the trouble of the fight, and to overturn the general laws by which he governs the Universe.

“For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever.”ⁱ—In Chron. xxix. 11, we find, “Thine, O Jehovah, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom Jehovah, and thou art exalted as head above all.” We find this prayer also in Luke xi. 2-4, but in a slightly shortened form. The curiously different language which Matthew and Luke cause Jesus to hold at the time he gives this prayer to his disciples is worth noticing.

But after thus commenting on “The Lord’s Prayer” in detail, we must address ourselves to the question, Has it been beneficial, was it wise, to give to the disciples a form of prayer at all? For what is spiritual prayer? Paul tells us, “We know not what to pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us, with groanings that cannot be uttered.” This is to avow, that no two hearts can pray entirely alike; *no full prayer can have literary expression.* Look at all the superstitions which the Pater Noster has for ages caused. Did Jesus foresee this? It is hard to think so.

Prayer, as understood by Paul, is the upward pressure of spiritual aspiration or of painful need:

Prayer is the Soul’s sincere desire,

Unuttered or expressed,

The heaving of a hidden fire

That stirs within the breast.

Prayer is the utterance of a sigh,

The falling of a tear,

The upward lifting of an eye

When only God is near.—J. MONTGOMERY.

ⁱ THE DOXOLOGY.—There is little doubt that this made no part of the prayer as dictated by our Lord.

Prayer, as inculcated in the Pater Noster, can be only an external church document. Shall we adopt the theory of a few, that Jesus intended merely to give instruction in outline as to the proper topics of prayer? It may be. Certain it is, that Christians systematically disobey his command in this very matter. Jesus bade them not to use vain repetitions; yet not only does the Church of Rome cause the Pater Noster to be gabbled over to the counting of beads; the Protestant Church of England also recites the Lord's Prayer four times at a single meeting. Jesus forbade his disciples *to pray in public*, which he stigmatises as hypocrisy; yet *public prayer* is now practically identified with religion, and one who refuses to attend it is treated as an infidel. Our dissenters, who avoid the error of repeating the Lord's Prayer, are more and more forward in the other more offensive error. At the corners of our streets, and on the lawns and the sands of our watering-places, we are annoyed by men, standing aloft, praying aloud or singing hymns, who fancy that hereby they are fulfilling their Master's precepts.

In this examination of "The Lord's Prayer" we have confined ourselves to pointing out what our prayers should not be. What they should be may, in part, be learned from the pamphlet, in this same series, 'Basis of a New Reformation.'

