

C7 23

Did Prayer Save the Life

OF THE

Prince of Wales?

BY

J. M. DIXON,

MINISTER OF BOWLALLEY LANE CHAPEL, HULL.

HULL:

FISHER, WALKER, AND BROWN, 7, SCALE LANE.

—
1872.

The prayer of faith shall save the sick.

ST. JAMES.

The doctrine of the Old Testament is the religion of England. The first leaf of the New Testament it does not open. It believes in a Providence which does not treat with levity a pound sterling. They are neither transcendentalists nor Christians. They put up no Socratic prayer, much less any saintly prayer for the queen's mind ; ask neither for light or right, but say bluntly "grant her in health and wealth long to live."

EMERSON.

Thrice blest whose lives are faithful prayers,
Whose loves in higher love endure ;
What souls possess themselves so pure,
Or is there blessedness like theirs ?

TENNYSON.



Did Prayer Save the Life

OF THE

Prince of Wales?

THE child feeling the smart of physical pain, and knowing nothing of the imperiousness of natural law, runs to his parent for relief. The little one imagines that his father has control of the powers of nature, and can grant all his childish desires. He petitions his father for the gratification of his wishes, and cries, kicks and rebels, when his prayers of ignorance are not answered according to their folly. It is much the same in the mental childishness of man. The savage thinks that he can manage the capricious temper of his god by the offering of human blood. The semi-barbarous Hebrew imagines that he can change the frown of Jehovah into a smile by the sacrifice of animals, or his own child; and, St. James, in sublime ignorance of the Divine order, says, prayer can change the weather, and restore the dying human body to health.

Such conceptions were the creation of the mental child, when the great unknown power of the universe was conceived as a capricious man, to be changed in temper and action by the sins and prayers of his creatures. Now, we know that the Eternal blesses in reward and penalty by law, fixed and unchangeable. Every revelation of science confirms the lesson of experience, that prayer cannot influence the Author of Life to produce a physical effect by a spiritual cause. Were God to act out of the order of his law in the domain of matter, in answer to man's prayer, the whole world of physical law would be uncertain. Fire might refuse to burn or warm, boiling water might bite us like frost, and ice burn us like fire, the solid earth might become water, and water be changed at any moment into dry land. The law which served us yesterday might utterly fail us to-day—the material world be the sport of prayer. The fixed order of the world, the

universal prevalence of law, is our protection against fanaticism, and our assurance that no breath of man's can pluck the order of nature out of the Father's hand, or induce Him to suspend, in any case, the action of cause and effect.

We had thought, that as a nation, we had outgrown the childish theory of St. James on the subject of prayer, and risen to the higher view which sees the order of law in all things, in the smallest as well as the greatest, in the modest lily, the hair of the head, and in the falling sparrow. But we have been recently told, not merely by fever-heated revivalists, and dull-eyed fanatics, but also by men of culture, in high places, that the prayers of this nation have saved a human life. The God of England, we are assured, has been persuaded by the clergy and their people to step out of the order of the physical world to save the life of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales. This young man has recently been at "death's door." The demon of bad drainage seized him and pulled him down to the lowest point of life. A good constitution, the best medical skill, with every facility for recovery, successfully resisted the demon of disease. The battle between life and death was for a considerable time doubtful. And in this state of suspense the sympathy of the nation went strongly and tenderly to the sufferer. He has never been a light of the land, or bread of life to the nation, never distinguished for wisdom. But he is probably wiser and better than he has generally been represented. He will, however, be our future King, if he live, and his death at this time might have caused some trouble in our land. Besides, he is a young man, and it is always peculiarly saddening to see death in the morning of life, or biting winter rush into the full spring time. We all rejoice in the Prince's recovery, for his good mother's sake, for his sweet wife's sake, and for his own sake.

But, while we thus rejoice, we are saddened by the general manifestation of dark, heathenish superstition, which ascribes the cure of the Prince to the prayers of the nation. *The Rock* (December 22, 1871), the organ of the largest party in the Established Church, says:—"A tidal wave of prayer rolled through the country on Sunday week, which, we may hope and believe, will have saved the Heir Apparent for the kingdom, and perhaps a kingdom for the Heir Apparent. 'It was a great salvation,' and so signal an answer to prayer that the secular journals of all classes have acknowledged the plain connection between cause and effect in the standing miracle of covenant prayer." Here we are told that a miracle was wrought to save the life of the Prince, in answer to prayer. If the crisis in the sufferer had passed immediately after the prayers of the churches, minds unperverted by theology

would have said a happy and remarkable coincidence. But this case is not even a coincidence, for the crisis had passed some hours before the telegram prayer of the Archbishop was read in the churches. Thus the clergy ascribe to their prayers what is due to the skilful medical men and the good constitution of the Prince. We have known cases that seemed to have far more of miracle on the face of them than the recovery of the Prince of Wales. Take one as a sample. We once heard an old man say in a Methodist meeting, that God had sent him bread in answer to his prayer. The poor man was hungry and knew not how to get a crust honestly. He went down on his knees, and in old Methodist fashion prayed to God to send him something to eat, and when he rose from his prayer the cart of the provision dealer was at his door, with the needful for him. A happy coincidence. But the simple, good, old man gave all the credit to his prayers. It did not occur to him, what we knew to be a fact, that the provisions had been put in the cart long before he began to pray for them. Still, this is a more plausible case of miracle in answer to prayer than the recovery of the Prince. It is also an easy and a cheap way of getting bread, and an excellent plan for keeping down the poor rates. But, unfortunately, or fortunately, God does not give the daily bread in this way. Neither does he work a miracle or breathe through natural law to save the life of Prince or beggar.

Do the clergy and their followers really believe that their prayers saved the life of the Prince of Wales? If they do, why do they not exercise that mighty power more for the good of the world? This Royal life is not more precious than many others. This young man has nothing to recommend him to the special sympathy of the nation, but his high station. There are lives far more valuable to the country than his. And if prayer can save life, why is not that magic power exerted to keep the Kings and Princes of intellect and heart in this world their full natural time? Does the God of England care more for social status, sounding titles, and gilded mediocrity, than for genius of mind and wealth of heart? If prayer can save human life why all this suffering, and all this death before the night of life? Priests and people! if you have this power, go at once and comfort every weeping Rachel. At this moment, yea, every moment, there are poor, lonely, broken-hearted women sitting at the bed sides of their dying sons. How these mothers pour out the prayers of their hearts that their sons may be spared a few years more. But the sons die, and, with their death the light of life goes from the hearts of the mothers. What a dark, dismal night in the hearts of the poor, weeping Rachels, without a ray of light in the valley of time. If ever God saves life in answer to prayer, surely he would save in such cases as these.

Men of the pulpit, and people of the pews! if your prayers could be effectual in such instances why do you not offer them? Or, is the God of England a respecter of persons? Does he save the son of the Royal widow in answer to prayer, and refuse to spare the life of the poor widow's son when she cries her prayer of agony? Are the lives of the common people and the Royal of intellect and heart of less importance in the eyes of God than the life of this young man? Surely no professed follower of the lovely Nazarene will answer in the affirmative.

If men have this miracle power of prayer, away with medical skill, science, and sanitary reform. Let us go back to "the good old days" of ignorance and dirt. Break up our Boards of Health. Why waste our money for these when we can have health by the short and easy method of prayer? When we are sick we will pray, and be made whole. When the drainage is bad, and the air laden with poison, we will pray, and be saved. And if God will do miracles for the body, why not also for the mind? Let us live in wilful ignorance, and pray to be wise. Yea, let us have the miracles which will make us all men and women of genius. And surely if prayer can save the bodies of men it can also save their souls. How is it then that we have so many heathens in our land? There are thousands upon thousands of human beings in the hells of time in all our large towns. Men sunk in crime, women who have sold their purity, children lost in moral and physical corruption. Day by day, countless numbers of earnest men and women pray that these poor home heathens may be delivered from the devil of vice; and still the vicious are unsaved. If prayer could make men wise and good, earth would be a Paradise, for there are no lack of prayers for Heaven's will to "be done on earth."

It clearly is not the will of the Eternal that prayer should save men, mentally, morally, or bodily. And the very people who say that God saved the life of the Prince of Wales, in answer to their prayers, do not practically believe in such efficacy of prayer. They recently denied their own theory in prosecuting the "Peculiar Family," for trusting to prayer and anointing, to save the lives of their children. That people kept to the Bible lesson—"The prayer of faith shall save the sick." They had a larger faith than the ministers and members of the popular churches. They would have no secondary cause to cast suspicion on *the* cause; doctors and medicine they would not have. This lamentable fanaticism is the logical sequence of the church theory that prayer has saved a human life. And the ministers and congregations in our land, with few exceptions, have recently encouraged this superstition, which confronts God's law, and calls human attention from the Divine order.

After this we must not be surprised to hear of church prayers for the death of such troublesome persons as unorthodox thinkers. The notion that God will save men in answer to prayer, naturally leads to the other ignorant presumption—that he will remove obnoxious persons from this world for the petitions of the self-styled faithful. If God saved the life of the Prince for the prayers of the nation, why not those whose heaven cannot admit a thought beyond their little theology, pray that those whom they please to call heretics and unbelievers, may be sent to a speedy death? The recent fanaticism of our churches finds genial society in that bigoted zeal which in America, a few years ago, thus prayed for a great preacher and author of unpopular belief :—“ O Lord, *if* this man *is* a subject of grace, convert him and bring him into the kingdom of thy dear Son : but if he is beyond the reach of the saving influence of the Gospel, *remove* him out of the way, and let his influence *die with him.*” “ O Lord, send *confusion* and *distraction* into his study this *afternoon*, and *prevent* his finishing his preparation for his labours to-morrow ; or if he shall attempt to desecrate thy holy day by attempting to speak to the people, meet him there, O Lord, and confound him so that he shall not be able to speak !” How very kind, thus to pray, for a man whose sin is that of refusing to bow to the popular theology.

This baneful superstition — this folly of prayer — means that the government of the world is in the hands of caprice. It would throw the world back to the dark days, when men cowered before a tyrant and an uncertain God, the creation of human ignorance. But light is coming before which superstition wanes. “The religion which is to guide and fulfil the present and coming ages, whatever else it be, must be intellectual. The scientific mind must have a faith which is science. ‘There are two things,’ said Mahomet, ‘which I abhor—the learned in his infidelities, and the fool in his devotions!’ Our times are impatient of both, and especially the last. Let us have nothing now which is not its own evidence. There is surely enough for the heart and imagination in the religion itself. Let us not be pestered with assertions and half-truths, with emotions and snuffe.”

The wisely devout man will not take prayer into the region of physics. He who is wisely impressed with the solemn mystery of life, and the secret emotions of his spiritual nature, will be reserved in his devout utterances. The things of his deeper life are often too delicate and sacred to be proclaimed in the ears of men. In such spiritual moods man prefers the prayer of hidden desire to that which goes forth in speech. He loves to be with the Lord of

8 DID PRAYER SAVE THE LIFE OF THE PRINCE OF WALES?

life, in the lone garden of devout soliloquy, and on the holy mount of aspiration, where

“No voice breaks through the stillness of this world,”

where there is deep, deep silence, which to the listening ear is the most audible speech. Above all, he will have the prayer without ceasing, the life of devotion, by living in the spirit of truth, and in the constant unfolding of his powers. Thus, his life will be a perpetual prayer, and an unbroken hymn of praise, making part of the full choral service in Mother Church—the Cathedral of Nature. And, yet, he will feel that he is but a stammerer in the choir of “St. Nature” :—

“With stammering lips and insufficient sound
I strive and struggle to deliver right
That music of my nature, day and night
With dream and thought and feeling interwound,
And inly answering all the senses round
With octaves of a mystic depth and height
Which step out grandly to the infinite
From the dark edges of the sensual ground.”

