

# THE FOLLY OF PRAYER

BY

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## INTRODUCTION.

THE following Essay was first published in 1880, and a second edition was published in 1884, with an introduction dealing with current illustrations of the doctrine of prayer. In issuing this third edition I rewrite that Introduction, bringing the subject "up to date."

My Essay was originally entitled *The Futility of Prayer*, but the second edition bore the more forcible title of *The Folly of Prayer*. I am convinced that Heine was right when he said that "the superfluous is harmful." Progress is so huge a task, so arduous, and so painful, that any diversion of human energy into unprofitable channels is a disaster. If prayer is futile, it is a folly.

I omitted in my Essay to mention the recovery of the Prince of Wales from gastric fever, many years ago, and the National Thanksgiving Service held in St. Paul's Cathedral. What orgies of religious excitement were worked up by the London press, and notably by that eminently pious journal, the *Daily Telegraph*! How we were bidden to watch the great national wave of prayer surging against the throne of grace! Thanks to a good constitution, and the highest medical skill, the Prince recovered. But the clergy insisted that his recovery was due to prayer. Accordingly they organised a stupendous farce at St. Paul's, where they thanked God for his marvellous mercy. But amidst all the delirium the authorities retained a little sagacity. The doctors were handsomely rewarded, and one of them was elevated to the dignity of a knight. Deity received the empty praise, and the physicians the solid pudding.

Several years after that interesting event, President Garfield was assassinated by a wretched being, whose mind was diseased with vanity and religion. Week after week science fought with death over the President's sick bed, while prayers for his recovery were offered up in every church and chapel in the United States. But his life ebbed slowly away amid a people's supplications. If prayer saved the life of

## *Introduction.*

the Prince of Wales, why did it not save the life of President Garfield? Is God a respecter of persons? Or is the Deity so monarchical that he will not succor the President of a Republic? It is difficult to see how the fatality of Guiteau's bullet can be explained, without denying the efficacy of prayer, or impeaching the character of God.

When France and Italy were visited by the cholera, in 1884, it naturally excited the popular superstition. Religious processions and public prayers to the Virgin were frequently demanded, but the civic authorities resisted these pious clamors, and it is a remarkable fact that they were usually supported by the higher priests, who were sensible enough to perceive that excitement would render the multitude more susceptible to the plague. There can be little doubt that, if England were visited by the plague, our higher clergy would exhibit the same prudence, although our Prayer Book contains a form of "prayer in time of sickness."

During the present year the north of Italy and the south of France have suffered from earthquakes. But while the gambling hell of Monte Carlo was scarcely shaken, the sacred edifices of many other towns have been injured or demolished. The inhabitants of Bajardo fled from their dwellings at the first shock, and assembled in the parish church, where they fell on their knees, and implored the divine protection. The priests and the people were praying with one voice, when the celestial answer arrived. A fresh wave of earthquake rent the walls, and the roof fell in on the devoted crowd, killing three hundred, and mutilating as many more.

Such an appalling illustration of the folly of prayer might be thought sufficient to destroy the doctrine. But superstition is not so easily extinguished. Faith is superior to logic, and there is always a loophole for the Deity's escape. Prayer is like the quick-tongued gambler; it plays on the principle of "heads I win, tails you lose." All the facts on one side are counted, and all on the other side neglected.

There is even a subtler form of the same irrationality. It is sometimes said that God helps those who help themselves. We must trust in God, but we must also keep our powder dry. This exhortation, however, loses sight of the very essence of the problem. The deity is supplicated when our own resources fail, and it is certainly absurd to credit another being, however exalted, with the fruits of our own wisdom, our own courage, and our own strength. Such a one-sided doctrine is not too severely satirised in the following epigram by James Thomson:

### *Introduction.*

“God helpeth him who helps himself,  
They preach to us as a fact,  
Which seems to lay up God on the shelf,  
And leave the man to act.

Whish seems to mean—You do the work,  
Have all the trouble and pains,  
While God, that indolent grand Old Turk,  
Gets credit for the gains.”

It may be safely said that there is very little practical belief in the efficacy of prayer among the clergy themselves. Whole regiments of the Black Army may be seen at places like Bath, in search of health and rich widows. When they fall ill they act like other men. They consult Dr. Science instead of Dr. Providence, and leave the Lord's vineyard for the seaside. Faith is the same in both places, but the air is different, and it is a curious fact in religious chemistry that prayer is more efficacious when it is taken with oxygen than when it is taken with carbonic acid gas.

Mr. Spurgeon, for instance, is accounted one of the most orthodox preachers of our age. He maintains all the time-honored doctrines of Christianity, and among them the efficacy of prayer. But his own practice is a curious commentary on his teaching. Whenever he is troubled by his old acquaintance the gout, he rushes off to Mentone, and leaves his congregation at home to pray for him; and as soon as the Mediterranean air and sunshine have given him relief, he writes to the Tabernacle “Beloved, the Lord has heard our prayers.” The unctuous hypocrisy of all this would be beneath contempt, if religion were not such a lively influence for evil. Not only could God cure Mr. Spurgeon's gout in South London as easily as in the South of France, but he might extend his divine assistance to the myriad sufferers from disease in the back-streets and slums of the metropolis, who do not earn a few thousands a year by preaching the gospel, and are unable to take a month's holiday at a fashionable watering-place.

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## THE FOLLY OF PRAYER.

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“THERE was,” says Luther in his *Table Talk*, “a great drought, as it had not rained for a long time, and the grain in the field began to dry up, when Dr. M. L. prayed continually and said finally with heavy sighs: O Lord, pray regard our petition in behalf of thy promise. . . . I know that we cry to thee and sigh desirously; why dost thou not hear us? And the very next night there came a very fine fruitful rain.” From Luther to Sammy Hicks the Yorkshireman is a far cry, but an episode of his history somewhat resembles this naïve story of the great Reformer. Sammy Hicks was a miller and a Methodist, and once while looking forward to a Love Feast, at which cakes were consumed, he was sorely troubled by a dead calm that lasted for days together, and caused a complete stoppage of his windmill. It so happened that all the flour was exhausted before the calm was broken, and on the very eve of the Love Feast there was none left for the cakes. In this extremity recourse was had to prayer. Sammy himself, who excelled in that line, petitioned Heaven for a breath of wind to fill his sails. In a few moments the cheeks of the suppliants were fanned by a gentle zephyr, which rapidly grew to a strong breeze. Around went the sails of Sammy’s mill, until enough flour was ground to make the Love Feast cakes, when the wind suddenly subsided and died away as miraculously as it came.

How amusing are both Luther and Sammy Hicks, in these instances, to the educated minds of to-day! Yet amongst the ignorant and those who are not imbued with the spirit of Science, the old superstition of prayer still lingers, and ever and anon betrays itself in speech and act. Whatever remnant of superstition exists the priests are very careful to foster. Accordingly, whenever an opportunity occurs, they stimulate popular folly and make themselves the laughing-stock or contempt of the wise and thoughtful. In Catholic countries the miracles of the Middle Ages are even now, in this age of railways and electric telegraphs, repeated before the shrines of new-fangled saints. Pilgrims journey to Lourdes and other holy places, where the credulity of the multitude is equalled by the imposture of their priests. The blood of St. Januarius still liquefies annually at Naples, precious relics heal all manner of

diseases, and the Virgin appears to prayerful peasants and hysterical nuns. In England these things do not happen, for there is not faith enough to make them possible. Yet here also the Catholic priests get souls out of purgatory by the saying of masses which have to be duly paid for; and our own Protestant priests, who have relinquished almost every peculiar function of their office, still retain one, that of standing between us and bad weather. We may call them our Rain Doctors, a name applied to the African medicine-men, who beat gongs and dance and shout to scare off the sun and bring down rain when the land is parched with drought. The difference between a bishop of the English Church praying for sunshine and an African medicine-man howling for wet, is purely accidental and nowise intrinsic. Intellectually they stand on the same level, the sole difference being that one goes through his performance in a vulgar and the other in a high-bred fashion. Perhaps there is another difference; one may be honest and the other dishonest, one sincere and the other hypocritical. Cato wondered how two augurs could meet without laughter, and probably it would be comical to witness the meeting of two friendly parsons after a lusty bout of prayer for fine weather.

In 1879 we were afflicted with a descent of rain scarcely paralleled in the century. Through the spring and through the summer the deluge persisted, and each month seemed to bring more violent storms than its predecessors. Yet our Rain Doctors kept as quiet as mice. Perhaps they reflected that it was scarcely politic to pray for sunshine until the Americans had ceased to telegraph the approach of fresh tempests. How different from the African Rain Doctors, who will pray for rain while the sun glares torrid and implacable, and no cloudlet mitigates the awful azure of heaven! But, deceived by a brief spell of fine weather in the middle of July, they suddenly plucked up courage and proceeded to counsel Omnisce. The result was woeful. On the very next Sunday after prayers for fine weather began to be offered, a terrific storm burst over the land, and for weeks after the rain was almost incessant. During one week in August only seventeen hours of sunshine were registered in London. The harvest was spoiled, about forty million pounds' worth of produce was lost to the country, and farmers looked in the face of ruin. This was the answer to prayer!

Yet the votaries of superstition and their priestly abettors will not admit the futility of prayer. Their reasoning is like the gambler's "heads I win, tails you lose"! All the facts that tell for their case are allowed to count, and all that tell against it are excluded. If what they pray for happens, that proves the efficacy

of prayer ; if it does not happen, that proves nothing at all. Such is the logic of superstition in every age and clime.

Notwithstanding the occasional outbursts of our Rain Doctors, it is evident that the doctrine of Prayer is being gradually refined away, like many other doctrines of theology. It originated in simpler times, when people thought that something tangible could be got by it. Whenever danger or difficulty confronted our barbarous ancestors, they naturally looked to the god or gods of their faith for assistance. If any transcendental philosopher or mystical theologian had told them that prayer was not a practical request but a spiritual aspiration, they would have answered with a stare of astonishment. Even the New Testament embodies the belief of the savage, although in a slightly refined form, and the Lord's Prayer contains a distinct request for daily bread. Before the advent of science, when men ignorantly and unskilfully wrestled with the manifold evils of life, their prayers for aid were grimly earnest, and often the last cry of despair. Fire, earthquake, flood, famine, and pestilence, afflicted them sorely ; often they gazed blankly on sheer ruin ; and in lifting their supplicating hands and eyes and voice, they besought no spiritual anodyne, but a real outward relief. The hand of supernatural power was expected to visibly interpose on their behalf. Now, however, the idea of prayer is greatly changed for all save a few fools or fanatics. Educated Christians, for the most part, do not appear to think that objective miracles are wrought in answer to prayer. They think that now God only works subjective miracles, and by operating upon men's hearts, produces results that would not happen in the natural course of things. According to this subtler form of superstition, outward circumstances are never interfered with, but our inward condition is changed to suit them. Thus, if a ship were speeding onward to some fatal danger of simoon or sunken reef, God would not alter the circuit of the storm, or remove the rocks from the ship's path, but if he deigned to interpose would work upon the captain's mind and induce him to deviate from his appointed course. If an innocent man were sentenced to be hung, God would not break the rope or strike the executioner blind, but he might influence the Home Secretary to grant a reprieve. Or if in a thunder-storm we had sought the shelter of a tree, God would not divert the lightning, although he might, just before it struck the tree, whisper that we had better move on.

This last refinement of the doctrine of the efficacy of prayer is very intelligible to the psychologist. Physical science has thoroughly demonstrated the reign of law in the material universe, and educated people are indisposed to look for miracles in that direc-



tion, notwithstanding the occasional attempts of our rain doctors to cure bad weather with spiritual medicines. But mental science has produced much less effect. Man's mind is still supposed to be a chaos, haunted and mysteriously influenced by a phantasmal free-will. Save by a few philosophers and students, the reign of law is not suspected to obtain there. Accordingly the miracles which were thought to occur in the material world are now relegated to the spiritual world—a ghoul-haunted region wherein there survives a home for them. Yet progress is being made here also, and we may confidently predict that as miracles have been banished from the domain of matter, so they will be banished from the domain of mind. The reign of law, it will be perceived, is universal within us as without us. It is manifested alike in the growth of a blade of grass and in the silent procession of the stars; alike in tumult and in peace, in the loud overwhelming storm or engulfing earthquake, and in the soft-falling rain or golden sunshine nurturing the grass in a thousand valleys and ripening the harvest on a thousand plains; and no less apparent in the noblest leaps of passion and the highest flights of thought, but binding all things in one harmonious whole, so that the brain of Shakespeare and the heart of Buddha acknowledge kinship with the mountains, waves and skies.

Meanwhile the sceptic asks the believer in prayer to justify it, and show that it is not merely a superstitious and foolish waste of energy. The proper spirit in which to approach this subject is the rational and not the credulous. The efficacy of prayer is a question to be decided by the methods of science. If efficacious, prayer is a cause, and its presence may be detected by experiment or investigation. The experimental method is the best, but there is difficulty in applying it, as the believers perversely refuse to undertake their share of the process. Professor Tyndall on behalf (I think) of Sir Henry Thompson, has proposed that a ward in some hospital should be set apart, and the patients in it specially prayed for, so that it might be ascertained whether more cures were effected in it than in other wards containing similar patients, and tended by the same medical and nursing skill. This proposal the theologians fought shy of; and one of them (Dr. Littledale) gravely rebuked Professor Tyndall for presuming to think that God Almighty would submit to be made the subject of a scientific experiment. Theologically there is much force in this objection, although scientifically and morally there is none. A universal Father would assuredly welcome such a test of his goodness, but the proud irascible God of theology would be sure to frown upon it, and signalise his preference for the fine old plan of closing our eyes while opening our mouths to

receive his benefactions. There is a way, however, to take him at it were by a side-wind. There are certain things impossible even to Omnipotence. Sidney Smith (I think) said that God himself could not make a clock strike less than one. Nor can any power revoke what has already occurred.

“Not heaven itself upon the past has power,”

as Dryden tells us. The past is irrevocable, and we may investigate it for the purpose of ascertaining whether prayer *has been* efficacious, without the least fear of being baffled by any power in the heavens above, in the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth. People have prayed enough in the past—far more, indeed, than they are likely to pray in the future—and if we find that their prayers have been futile, the whole question at issue must be considered as practically decided in the negative.

Let us dismiss all appeals to individual experience, and deal only with broad classes of facts. It is quite impossible in any particular case to determine whether prayer has been answered or not, even when the object besought has been wholly obtained. A single result is so often produced by a combination of causes, some obvious and direct, and others obscure and indirect, that we cannot absolutely say whether the natural agencies have operated alone or in conjunction with a supernatural power. If after long and fervent prayers a precious life has been spared, it cannot be affirmed that prayer was a cause of the recovery, since the sick person might have recovered without it. Nor, on the other hand, can it be affirmed that prayer was not a cause, since the sick person might have died without it. Our ignorance in such cases precludes us from deciding one way or the other. The only way to neutralise this is to examine general categories, to take whole classes of persons, and see whether those who pray get what they ask for any more than those who do not pray, or if classes of persons who are prayed for by others are more favored than those who enjoy no such advantage.

Pursuing this line of inquiry, Mr. Francis Galton, the author of a remarkable work on “Hereditary Genius,” was led many years ago to collect and collate statistics relative to the subject of prayer, which he subsequently published in the *Fortnightly Review* of August, 1872. Mr. Galton’s article did not, so far as I am aware, attract the attention it deserved. Its facts and conclusions are of great importance, and the remainder of my own essay will be largely indebted to it.

Let us take first the case of recovery from sickness. It has been frequently remarked that sickness is more afflictive than death

itself, and it is common for persons who suffer from it, if they are at all of a religious turn of mind, to pray for relief and restoration to health. Their relatives also pray for them. However pious men may be, they always submit to Omniscience their own view of the case when their lives are in the least degree endangered; and however fervently they believe in the eternal and ineffable felicities of heaven, they are scarcely ever content to leave this vale of tears. They desire as long a continuance of life on this earth as the sceptic does. Often, indeed, they repine far more than the sceptic at the ordinance of fate. Now, as a matter of fact, is it found that pious persons of a prayerful disposition recover from sickness more frequently than worldly persons who are not in the habit of praying at all? If so, the medical profession would long ago have discovered it, and prayer would have taken a recognised place among sanative agencies. On this point Mr. Galton writes as follows:—

“The medical works of modern Europe teem with records of individual illnesses and of broad averages of disease, but I have been able to discover hardly any instance in which a medical man of any repute has attributed recovery to the influence of prayer. There is not a single instance, to my knowledge, in which papers read before statistical societies have recognised the agency of prayer either on disease or on anything else. The universal habit of the scientific world to ignore the agency of prayer is a very important fact. To fully appreciate the ‘eloquence of the silence’ of medical men, we must bear in mind the care with which they endeavor to assign a sanitary value to every influence. Had prayers for the sick any notable effect, it is incredible but that the doctors, who are always on the watch for such things, should have observed it, and added their influence to that of the priests towards obtaining them for every sick man. If they abstain from doing so, it is not because their attention has never been awakened to the possible efficacy of prayer, but, on the contrary, that although they have heard it insisted on from childhood upwards, they are unable to detect its influence.”

It thus appears that prayer is a medicine only in the pharmacopœia of the priests. Many doctors rather dislike it. A medical friend of mine, who hated the sight of a parson, used always to keep any member of the clerical fraternity waiting outside the sick-room door in extreme cases, until it was certain that death would supervene. He would then allow the reverend gentleman to go through his performance, knowing that he could do harm. My friend said that when his patients required absolute repose their nerves were often agitated in his absence by obtrusive and officious priests.

A class of persons who are specially and generally prayed for are kings and queens and other members of royal families. A high value is always set on things which cost a great deal. Royal personages are very expensive, and we naturally esteem and love them according to their cost. Animated by an amiable desire that they

may long live to spend the money we delight to shower upon them, we pray that God will prolong their existence beyond that of ordinary mortals. "Grant her in health and wealth long to live," is the prayer offered up for the Queen in our State churches, and the same petition is made in hundreds of Nonconformist chapels. If, then, there be any efficacy in prayer, kings should enjoy a greater longevity than their subjects. We do not, however, find this to be the case. The average age of ninety-seven members of royal houses who lived from 1758 to 1843, and survived their thirtieth year, was 54.04 years, which is nearly two years *less* than the average age of the shortest-lived of the well-to-do classes, and more than six years less than that of the longest. Sovereigns are literally the shortest lived of all who have the advantage of affluence. In their case it is evident that prayer has been absolutely of no avail.

Another class of men very much prayed for are the clergy. They pray for themselves, and as they all profess to be called to the ministry by the Holy Ghost their prayers should be unusually efficacious. If there be any faith capable of removing mountains, they should possess it. If the fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much, the fervent prayer of a parson should avail exceedingly. Now the clergy pray not for spiritual light and help, but also for temporal blessings. They like to prosper here as well as hereafter, and are adepts in the sublime art, reprobated by Jesus but luminously expounded and forcibly commended by Dr. Binney, of making the best of both worlds. They believe in heaven, but are in no haste to get there, being content to defer occupation of the heavenly mansions in store for them until they can no longer inhabit the snug residences provided for them here. With a laudable desire to enjoy the bird-in-the-hand to the uttermost before resorting to the bird-in-the-bush, which is sure to await their convenience, they naturally pray for health, and therefore long life, since health and longevity are inseparable friends. Yet we do not find that they live longer than their less pious brethren. The average age attained to by the clergy from 1758 to 1843, according to Mr. Galton's statistics, was 69.49 years, while that of lawyers was 68.14, and of medical men 67.31. Here is a slight advantage on the side of the clergy, but it is amply accounted for by the greater ease and comfort so many of them enjoy, and the general salubrity of their surroundings. The difference is, however, reversed when a comparison is made between distinguished members of the three classes—that is to say, between persons of sufficient note to have had their lives recorded in a biographical dictionary. Then we find the respective mean ages of the clergy, lawyers and doctors, are 66.42, 66.51 and 67.04, the clergy being the shortest lived of the

three. Thus they succumb sooner than the members of secular professions to a heavy demand on their energies. Prayer does not protect them from sickness, does not recover them when they are laid low, or in the least prolong their precious lives. They are no more favored than the ungodly; one fate befalls them both. In their case also prayer has been absolutely of no avail.

The same law obtains with regard to missionaries. They are not miraculously protected from sickness or danger, from perils by night or the pestilence that walketh by day. The duration of life among them is accurately proportioned to the hazards of their profession. Yet theirs is a case wherein prayer should be peculiarly effectual. Arriving in a remote region of the earth, they are almost powerless until they have acquired a thorough knowledge of the language and habits of the people. They are engaged in the Lord's work, and if any persons are watched over by him they should be. Yet at dangerous stations one missionary after another dies shortly after arrival, and their efforts are thus literally wasted, while the work naturally suffers because the Lord does not economise the missionary power which has been provided for it. Ships also have sunk with missionaries on board before they could even reach their destination; and the Lord has so far refrained from working subjective miracles on their behalf, that missionaries have been in some cases digested in the stomachs of the very savages whose souls they had journeyed thousands of miles to convert.

Parents are naturally very anxious as to their offspring, and it is to be presumed that the children of pious fathers and mothers are earnestly and constantly prayed for. This solicitude antedates birth, it being generally deemed a misfortune for a child to be still-born, and often a serious evil for death to deprive it of baptism, without which salvation is difficult if not impossible. In extreme cases the Catholic Church provided for the baptism of the child in the womb. Yet the prayers of pious parents are not found to exercise any appreciable influence. Mr. Galton analysed the lists of the *Record* and the *Times* of a particular period, and the proportion of still-births to the total number of deaths was discovered to be exactly the same in both. A more conclusive test than this could scarcely be devised.

Our nobility are another class especially prayed for. The prescription for their case may be found in the Church Liturgy. In a worldly sense they are undoubtedly very prosperous; they live on the fat of the land, and enjoy all kinds of privileges. But these are not the advantages we ask God to bestow upon them; we pray "that the nobility may be endued with grace, wisdom and understanding." And what is the result? The history of our glorious

aristocracy shows them to have always been singularly devoid of "grace," in the religious sense of the word; and they have manifested a similar plentiful lack of "wisdom and understanding." Even in politics, despite their exceptional training and opportunities, they have been beaten by unprayed-for commoners. Cromwell, Chatham, Pitt, Fox, Burke, Canning, all arose outside the sacred precincts of nobility. Gladstone is the son of a Liverpool merchant, and Earl Beaconsfield was the son of a literary Jew. In science, philosophy, literature and art, how few aristocrats have distinguished themselves! Further, as Mr. Galton points out, "wisdom and understanding" are incompatible with insanity. Yet our nobility are not exempted from that frightful scourge. On the contrary, owing to their intermarriages, and the lack of those wholesome restraints felt in humbler walks of life, they are peculiarly liable to it. Clearly the aristocracy have not been benefited by our prayers.

Let us now turn to another aspect of the question. How is it that insurance companies make no allowance for prayers? When a man wishes to insure his life, confidential questions are asked about his antecedents and his present condition, but the question, "Does he habitually pray?" is never ventured. Yet, if prayer conduces to health and longevity, this question is of great importance; nay, of the very greatest; for what are hereditary tendencies to disease, or the physical effects of previous modes of living, to a man under the especial protection of God? Insurance offices, however, eliminate prayer from their calculations. They do not recognise it as a sanitary influence, and this fact proves that there is no efficacy in prayer or that its efficacy is so slight as to be altogether inappreciable.

Suppose the owner of two ships, similarly built and rigged, and bound for the same port, wanted to insure them for the voyage; and suppose the one ship had a pious captain and crew taken red-hot from a Methodist prayer-meeting, while the captain and crew of the other ship, although excellent seamen, never entered a place of worship, never bent their knees in prayer, and never spoke of God except to take his name in vain. Would any difference be made in the rate of insurance? Assuredly not. And if the owner, being a soft-headed sincere Christian, should say to the agent: "But, my dear sir, the ship with the pious captain and crew, who will certainly pray for their safety every day, runs much less risk than the other, for the Lord has promised that he will answer prayer, that he will watch over those who trust him, and that whatsoever they ask, believing, that they shall receive," what would the answer be? Probably this: "My dear sir, as a Christian I admit

the truth of what you say, but I can't mix up my religion with my business. That sort of thing is all very well in church on Sunday, you know, but it doesn't do any other day in the week down in the City."

The decline and final extinction of belief in ordeals and duels is an episode in the history of prayer. Both these superstitious processes were appeals to God to decide what was indeterminable by human logic. In the ordeal of jealousy, so revoltingly set forth in the fifth chapter of Numbers, the same curious concoction was given to all suspected wives, and the difference in the effect produced was attributable solely to the interposition of God. The same idea prevailed in other forms during the chaotic Middle Ages, notably in connection with the witch mania. Some idea of the critical ability which accompanied it may be gathered from the fact that "witches" were often tied at the hands and feet, and thrown into the nearest pond or river: if they swam they were guilty, and at once burnt or hung, and if they sank they were innocent, but of course they were drowned! The duel was explicitly sanctioned and sometimes commanded by the ecclesiastical and secular authorities, and it was devoutly believed that God would give the victory to the just and overthrow the wrong. This belief has died out, but a reflex of it exists in the fond idea, not yet wholly discarded, that the God of battles fights on the side of his favorites. Only the simpletons think thus, and only the charlatans of clericalism abet them. All the praying in the world is powerless against superior tactics, more scientific arms, greater numbers, and better discipline. Victory, as Napoleon remarked, is on the side of the heaviest battalions; and prayer, as a counteractant to such advantages, is just as efficacious as the celebrated pill to cure earthquakes.

Driven from all tangible strongholds by inevitable logic, the believers in prayer take final refuge in their cloud-citadel of faith. They maintain that there is a spiritual if not a material efficacy in prayer, that communion with God exalts and purifies their inner nature, and thus indirectly influences the course of events. "Certainly," says a man of magnificent genius, though not a Materialist, "it does alter him who prays, and alters him supremely, changing despair into hope, confusion into steady light, timidity into confidence, cowardice into courage, hatred into love, and the genius of compromise into the spirit of martyrdom."\* Far be it from me to deny this. It is attested by the life and death of many a patient saint and martyred hero. But the God communed with has been after all not a person, but a lofty ideal, varying in each according

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\* Dr Garth Wilkinson, *Human Science and Divine Revelation*, p. 81.

to the greatness and purity of his nature. A similar communion, in essence the very same, is possible to the Humanitarian, who feels himself descended from the endless past, bound to the living and working present, and in a measure the parent of an endless future. His ideal of an ever-striving and ever-conquering Humanity, emerging generation after generation into loftier levels, and leaving at its feet the lusts and follies of its youth, serves him instead of a personal God; and in moments snatched from the hot strife of the world he can commune with it, either through its great poets and prophets, or solely through the vision of his own higher self, which is essential humanity within him, and thus find serenity and ennoblement of resolve. This communion, into which religious prayer may ultimately merge, will survive, because while inspiring it does not outrage intellect and fact. The laws of nature will not be suspended to suit our needs; for—

“ Nature with equal mind  
Sees all her sons at play;  
Sees man control the wind,  
The wind sweep man away!

Allows the proudly riding and the foundered bark.”\*

But “the music born of love,” as another poet tells us, will “ease the world’s immortal pain.” Finding no help outside ourselves, seeing no Providence to succor and comfort the afflicted, no hand to lift up the down-trodden and establish the weak, to wipe the tears from sorrowing eyes and convey balm to wounded hearts; knowing that except we listen the wail of human anguish is unheard, and that unless we give it no aid can come; we shall feel more imperative upon us the duties and holy charities of life. If the world’s misery cannot be assuaged by fatherly love from heaven, all the more need is there for brotherly love on earth.

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\* Matthew Arnold, *Empedocles on Etna*.