

THINGS TO COME

No. 115

JANUARY 1904.

Vol. X. No. 7.

Editorials

PRAYER:

Prayer is the breath of the New Nature, as the Word of God is its food.

In the natural world of physiology, we do not concern ourselves with the phenomena of digestion, but with the obtaining and partaking of our food. It is a sign of an abnormal condition of things, if we occupy ourselves with the analysis of our food, or with the process of digestion.

So with our breathing. Our one concern, physiologically, is to obtain pure air, and to breathe it. If we trouble ourselves with the act of breathing itself, we should soon be afraid to breathe at all.

So long as we think nothing about either, we both eat and breathe, while we unconsciously carry out the laws of physiology.

It is even so in the spiritual world. If we content ourselves with analyzing and describing the Word of God we shall never "grow thereby." If we would be properly nourished by it, we must actually feed upon it each one for himself. It will not strengthen us merely to listen to addresses about food, or on the art of carving it—we must partake of it ourselves and "inwardly digest it."

So with prayer. It is the breath of the New Nature. The moment we think about how we ought to breathe, or occupy ourselves with what breathing is, instead of breathing, we must sink and die.

In like manner, when we substitute the consideration of what prayer is, or ought to be; or when, or how it should be made; or have to search for suitable words to express the prayer, it ceases to serve its purpose, and is no longer the cause or effect of true spiritual vitality.

Breathing is at once the effect and the cause of natural life.

Prayer is at once the cause and maintenance of spiritual life.

To be real, it must be the outcome of the possession of spiritual life. It must be spiritually spontaneous, and as much without artificial plan and design, as our natural breathing is.

The moment it is otherwise, it ceases to be real prayer. Prayer, therefore, does not necessarily require *words*. It may be only the *breathings* of the New Nature (Lam. iii. 55, 56), but it is heard.

It may be only the *groaning*, as of Israel in Ex. ii. 23, 24, but it is heard.

It may be only *a cry*, as of David in Ps. lvii. 3, but it is heard.

It may be only the inward *unuttered cry*, as of Moses in Ex. xiv. 15. But it is heard and understood.

It may be only the *thought of* those who ear the LORD (Mal. iii. 16). But "the LORD hearkened and heard."

In other words, prayer is occupation of the spirit with God. It is having to do with Him.

Hence it is that we so often find it expressed by the word "cry."

In the New Testament, in all but two places,* it is one of two words: the former has regard to the *power* of Him with whom we have to do; while the latter marks our own *need* and *insufficiency*, and has regard to our special *necessity*.

This is why we are told to pray. It is not that God needs anything from us. It is not that He is ignorant of our needs, and thoughts, and desires. But prayer is meant to force us into the place of helplessness. It is meant to put us before the mighty God with our faces in the dust, confessing in ourselves we are nothing and have nothing, and can do nothing; but that our only hope and help is in God : that, in ourselves we can show no merit, no reason, no cause why we should have the least of His mercies, but that all must come from God to us through pure, free, sovereign grace. Not on account of the worthiness of our prayers (for that would at once be a ground *of* merit), but only because He is "the God of all grace."

This is beautifully illustrated by David in Psalm lvii. The character of THE PERSON PRAYING is shown by the opening words.

"Be merciful unto me, O God,
Be merciful unto me."

The repetition emphasizes the depth of his need, and of his destitution of spiritual things.

Those who know the place in which the very act of prayer is meant to put them, cannot boast of any stock of grace, for God does not entrust them with the keeping of it.

They come, and this is the burden of their cry "Nothing in my hand I bring."

They say (Ps. lvii.3): "I will cry unto God most high."

It is not begging, as though one knew what to ask, that we have here. Babes cry! And no plea is so strong with a mother. It is more so with him who hearkens to the cry of His people; the groan of the oppressed in the pit of corruption; the moan of those who are robbed and spoiled, and have "fallen among thieves." These call forth the concern, the care and help of "the good Samaritan," the "brother born for adversity," the High Priest who "has compassion on the ignorant, and on them who are out of the way."

Some may object to being brought down so low, but those who know anything of "God most high," will thankfully take their place of man, most low.

Some may say this is bringing man down to the level of the beasts! But no: Fallen man is below that level already.

*1 Tim. iv. 5, and Jas. v. 15.

Beasts can be tamed by man; they can be made useful and obedient; but fallen man by nature is "enmity against God. He is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7): *i.e.*, not of himself, but grace can search him and deal with him. Of Israel Jehovah said :

"The ox knoweth his owner,
And the ass his master's crib

But Israel doth not know,
My people doth not consider." (Isa. 1: 3).

Others may object and say we are making man a mere machine! We do nothing so great and good as that.

Man is nothing half as good as a machine. Look at a beautiful and complicated piece of machinery. See how marvelously, and perfectly, and exquisitely it carries out unerringly the will of him who made it. See how it performs exactly what its maker designed and planned. Where is man compared with this? Where were our first parents? Where is man, with all his education and religion? Does man always carry out the will of his Creator? Does man ever carry out the designs and plans of his Maker? No! Man is a mass of ruin, and not a machine. He is like a broken machine that is only a heap of broken, tangled rods, and bands, and wheels, utterly unable to perform his Maker's will.

Saved sinners, who have come under the power of the wondrous invincible grace of God, have discovered their own unworthiness and the glory of be face of God. They have realized their own helplessness. "They know something of the assaults of Satan, the hatred of the world, and the enmity of the flesh, and they say with David, " I will cry unto God most High."

They have had it revealed to them, that He who is now God most High, for their sakes became man most low: came like the good Samaritan " where He (the lost one) was"; attends to all his concerns; and provides and secures all needful blessings for him.

God most High is the God who " performeth [*all things*] for me," David says. Notice that "*all thins*" is in italics. The ellipsis is left for each one to fill in the blank according to his need. It is like Ps. Cxxxviii.:8 .

" The LORD will perfect [*that which*] concerneth me."

Various Translators have filled in the words according to their own ideas. One supplies the word "purposes"; another, " His mercy "; others, " His promises," or, " my desires." Luther supplies "my sorrow".

But it is needless for us to supply anything. If we supply one thing we necessarily shut out other things. A good word to supply would be the Saviour's own word "Whatsoever (John xiv: 13) . . . I will do it."

And note, it does not say I will enable you to do it. No! It is better than that: it is "I will do it." It is "God who performeth [all things] for me."

Many believers want to perform their own things for themselves, and ask only for a little enabling help. Others only want God to perform certain definite things for them. They thus " limit God."

Oh! How many there are today who fall into His People's sin when they "limited the Holy One of Israel" (Ps. lxxviii. 41).

What a snare is this! We see only one way of help or blessing, or deliverance: and we ask for that. We know not how many better ways the Lord has in His infinite wisdom. We know of one way, and we "limit" Him by asking for this, to our own hindrance and hurt.

Oh, let us beware of limiting the Holy One of Israel!

Prayer is meant to humble us, and to put us into the low place before "God most high," and

we-yes-the old nature in the best of us, turn that low place into a throne from which we dictate to God what He shall do for us or for others: what He shall do at home, or in Africa, or India, or China.

We, who cannot manage our own affairs-(for not one of us has managed them as he *wishes* he had), we do not hesitate to take on us the affairs of the universe, and ask for this and that to be done here and there. We could not do less, if we were omniscient!

If any ask us whether we are not "definite in our prayer"? We reply-we would be if we were omniscient! We would be if we did not fear to limit the Infinite, Almighty, God.

Oh! How blessed to have to do with " God most high,"

God that performeth all things for me." God, who knoweth what is best.

If we knew anything of His infinite wisdom, of His infinite power, of His infinite love, we should not be occupying ourselves with our own "surrender"; but we should be crying to "God most high," to perform His will for us, and to do whatsoever He pleases. And, this is not some point which we hope ultimately to reach; but it is the point which we should start from, the low place. No one can imagine what the blessed end of peace and rest would be, which is reached from such a starting-place.

No one can realize the fulness of meaning involved in the possession of "God that performeth all things for me" or of the Saviour's words "I will do it."

The lowest place is the place where we shall hear His voice saying: "I HAVE CAUSED thine iniquity to pass from thee, And I WILL CLOTHE thee with change of raiment " (Zech. iii.4).

When thus cleansed and clothed we shall sing, " HE HATH CLOTHED me with the garments of Salvation" (Is. lxi. 10).

When fainting by the way, we shall hear His word " HE MAKETH me to lie down....

" HE PREPARETH a table for me....(Ps. xxiii. 2, 5).

When our heart is hard, we shall remember that "GOD MAKETH my heart soft and the Almighty troubleth me (Job xxiii. 16).

When we feel our unprofitableness, we shall remember and say, "LORD, THOU HAST* WROUGHT all our works in us" (Is. xxvi. 12).

When, like Mephibosheth, we are in the land of "no pasture" (Lo Debar) and yearning for the presence and favour of the King, we shall remember the word, that is written: "Then King David SENT and FETCHED him." Ah! "God most High" is our God; the God who performeth all things for us. "The God of all grace."

Grace that sends for and fetches us.

Grace that cleanses and clothes us.

Grace that brings and carries us.

Grace that feeds and satisfies us.

Truly we may say with David, "I WILL CRY UNTO God most high, unto God that performeth all things for me."