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Saviour is no ineffable Absolute, the undistinguishing and indistinguishable Whole, in which finally all souls are lost, but the God and Father of Jesus Christ our Lord.

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DISCIPLINE IN PRAYER.

THE criticism is often passed upon religious experience that it is "mere emotion." This is to limit religious experience very much to the scope of feeling, and to exclude from it a very great deal that properly belongs to it—viz., thought and life, and the quiet examination of life—a great many unobtrusive elements which really form the more serious part of a man's experience of God. But, for the moment, let us limit ourselves to the matter of emotion. It is not clear why emotion should be ruled out. That, like other factors in life, it should be subjected to the tests of time and thought is obvious; but in itself it is at all events just as much right as it is wrong. It has a function, and that we have to recognise. We find very often that the religious life appears to begin with an immense flood-tide of emotion, that the emotion ebbs, and with its ebb the spirit is left as it were stranded, and the religious life ceases, or appears to cease. In this, at all events, the religious life stands very much on a level with all the higher modes of life.

For example, if we take the story of some great picture or great poem, what do we find? First of all, there has been a steady but unconscious assimilation of a very large number of facts; this thing, that, and the other impress themselves somehow on the mind of the artist, but he has not greatly cared about them. Then something happens, whatever it is; a great light shines upon this mass of facts,

of disjoined half-experiences, and they shape themselves into a thrilling unity, which is realised with an intense emotion—an emotion which in large part is an impulse to go deeper into the thing and to express both what has been felt and what is yet to be discovered in an interpretative way. The poet, we say, has his poem already. But he really has not. There is, as he knows well enough, an enormous interval between this experience and the poem. He sees and knows what he means to express; but, quite apart from the technical labour involved in the handling of words or paints, there is an immense deal to be done. He has to consort with the impulse and see where it will take him —to consort with it to the end. And, as he labours with the medium in which he has to work, he finds that the matter changes and changes again. New lights gleam, new relations and new combinations appear, suggesting new values; the impulse becomes another thing, and takes him further and further; until, when at last the poem is written or the picture painted, it is often quite different from that first conception which thrilled the artist and set him to work—"like, but oh, how different!" Without the initial emotion, it is hard to imagine that anything would or could have been done; with nothing but the emotion, it is certain that nothing would have been done at all.

Knowledge, generally speaking, is reached in the same way; it is dependent on intensity. Emotion carries the impulse with all its flame and power into the soul, but then a discipline is involved, carrying with it drudgery and disgust, weariness and dreariness, till achievement crowns all. Otherwise the emotion is fugitive and of little value, —with the added risk that neglected or undeveloped emotions mean a life of sterility, a habit of living on thrills, which effects nothing and leaves the soul less and less

effective. The artistic temperament, unless it is reinforced by what we may call the shop-keeper virtues, is a disaster. The great work of art is as much a sheer moral triumph as it is anything. "The way to perfection," said Pater, "lies through a series of disgusts." "The people of Verona," says Carlyle, "when they saw Dante on the streets, used to say, 'See, there is the man that was in Hell!' Ah, yes, he had been in Hell;—in Hell enough, in long severe sorrow and struggle; as the like of him is pretty sure to have been. Commedias that come-out *divine* are not accomplished otherwise. Thought, true labour of any kind, highest virtue itself, is it not the daughter of Pain?"

Religious emotion is subject to very much the same laws. The impulse has to be carried to the end, worked at, wrestled with, forced in a workaday world, in the monotony of life, to yield what it means. To stand still and let it alone—to wait "to see if it is mere emotion"—has only one end. It is as if the poet or the painter dropped his thought or his emotion and did no more with it. Religious emotion, too, has to be tested and carried further, like any other form of intuition—carried into life. It is tested in two ways at any rate—in obedience and in prayer; and it is of prayer that in this paper some slight account is to be given. For prayer is assailed much as religious emotion is, as essentially unreal—not, however, by those who have done much at it or with it.

Two, or three, main lines of attack are used upon prayer. It is compared to talking through a telephone which is disconnected at the other end; say what you will, as loud as you like, the receiver stands on the shelf, and nobody hears. There are many who have seemed to themselves to be praying on these terms, with a strong and growing feeling that there is no one at the other end, and yet a reluctance to leave off. It is argued further that in a world-order

fixed by Fate or God's wisdom, prayer must be ineffectual or, at best, needless—it is of no use to ask for a change. In each of these lines of reflexion it will be seen that there is a strong element of assumption or pre-conception. What right have you to assume that feeling is an exact guide to fact? Are they anywhere else always and necessarily associated? If we are to depend on feeling as our guide in life, we are the prey of moods. Feeling does tell us something, only its utterance is indistinct—the same feeling may indicate that the dinner is ill-cooked or the train late or the cheque-book mislaid or God non-existent or a hundred other things; and we really need better evidence. As for the second line of attack, it assumes that we know what we have no means whatever of knowing; it turns a conjecture into a fact, and that always means bad thinking. We really know nothing as to what is fixed for the next ten minutes; we do not know what factors are at work, and we tacitly assume that our own spirits are not among these factors—the whole line of argument is vicious from the start.

Both these conceptions of prayer imply one view only of it. It is conceived as petition; but prayer (if those who use it much may be trusted) includes a good many other things and is not so simple as that. Of course it is as simple as that, in one sense of the words—"Ask and ye shall receive" is plain enough, but there are different ways of asking. We may consider one or two other suggestions. Emerson somewhere described prayer as "looking at things from the highest point of view," and another has called it "laying things out before the Ultimate." Dr. Illingworth names it "a unique school of sincerity." All these accounts of it point one way—to what the philosopher called "the clarification of thought in prayer." This and that is on our minds, this and that we desire or fear;

and we lay out our thoughts, clearly and slowly, before our own eyes, with the co-operation of God, at least in His presence, against the background of His thoughts—and then we begin to be able to see what our thoughts and wishes mean. Thus, when we find the prophet Jeremiah saying: "Righteous art Thou, O Lord, when I plead with Thee: yet would I reason the cause with Thee: wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?" we shall not be far astray if we count this reasoning with God as prayer. We shall give the same account of the Psalmist, when he says: "I will hear what God the Lord will speak" (lxxxv. 8); and a closer study of that psalm will suggest what follows when the petitional is changed for the listening type of prayer.

There is another aspect of prayer which is sometimes overlooked. It is apt to be the instinctive act of love for another. In spite of all that is talked about germs and their communication, in spite of the fact that a baby pays no attention to its mother's kisses or is even worried by them, mothers continue to kiss their babies for no reason at all—except that they just will; and it appears that babies so treated do better by a long way than those scientifically reared on strict principle in Plato's republic or in St. Ives Workhouse. The instinct is sounder than its critics. Now when matters reach a certain stage, the prayer for the child is as instinctive and as inevitable as the kiss. In other words, right or wrong, parental love, whether God exists or does not exist, demands His existence and presses upon Him the care of the child. The parent's instinct knows the eternal value of the child, and is sure that God must be equally concerned with its goodness and happiness. To say that what is highest in us, this instinct for the child's supreme good, this purest and tenderest form of love, is not evidence, is surely to cut off from

us all chance of really knowing anything. And this instinct makes for prayer inevitably.

But supposing—to come to the third difficulty—supposing after all that in prayer man is merely imposing upon himself, suggesting to himself the existence of a power to help him and thence, from the very suggestion, deriving the strength he needs. We may ask whether this can be done at all, and then whether it can be done very generally. But, after all, "supposing" is not evidence; and as to whether prayer is of practical use or not, whatever the explanation of that may be, we may surely look to the generations of those who have prayed, and we shall find that, generally speaking, those who have prayed with most seriousness have been the best men and they have most believed in prayer. A formal use of prayer, on the other hand, does as little for character as any other affectation or external habit.

But after all, when we are dealing with the religious life, as with any other type, it is the highest that counts, and here we touch the life of our Lord. Historically, it is certain that He prayed and believed in prayer. The Gospels, and the Epistle to the Hebrews, lay emphasis on His practice. Early in the morning He withdrew to the desert; late at night He remained on the hillside for prayer. Wearied by the crowds that thronged Him, He kept apart and continued in prayer. He prays before He chooses the disciples; He gives thanks to God on their return from their missionary journey. Prayer is associated with the Mount of Transfiguration, with the confession of Caesarea Philippi, with Gethsemane. The writer to the Hebrews speaks of His "strong crying and tears" in prayer. The Gospels even mention what we should call His unanswered prayers. The prayer before the calling of the Twelve does not exclude Judas; and the cup does not pass in spite

of the prayer in Gethsemane. It is as if we had something to learn from the unanswered prayers of our Master. Certainly the content of the Gospel for us would have been poorer if they had been answered in our sense of the word; and this fact, taken with His own teaching on prayer and His own submission to the Father's will, may help us over some of our difficulties.

"As He was praying, they ask Him, Teach us to pray as John also taught his disciples." It looks as if at times His disciples caught Him at prayer, or even overheard Him, and felt that here was a prayer that took them out beyond all they had ever known of prayer. There were among them men whom John had taught to pray; was it they who asked Jesus to teach them over again? There may have been some of them who had learnt the Pharisee's way in prayer, and some who stuck to the simpler way they had been taught in childhood. In each case the old ways were outgrown.

We can put together what He taught them. In the first place, the thing must be real and individual—the first requirement always with Jesus. The public prayer of ostentation is out of the reckoning; it is nothing. The real prayer is to the Father in secret—His affair. And it will be earnest beyond what most of us think. We are so familiar with Gospel and parable that we do not take in the strenuousness of Jesus' way in prayer. The importunate widow and the friend at midnight are His types of insistent and incessant earnestness. Do you, He asks, pray with anything like their determination to be heard? The knock at the door and the pleading voice continue till the request is granted,—in each case by a reluctant giver. But God is not reluctant, He says, though God too will choose His own time to answer. It does not mean the corncrake reiteration of the heathen (*βατταλογεῖν*,

Matt. vi. 7)—not at all, that is not the business of praying; but the steady earnest concentration on the purpose, with the deeper and deeper clarification of the thought as we press home into God's presence till we get there. It was so He prayed, we may be sure. It is not idly that prayer has been called "the greatest task of the Christian man"; it will not be an easy thing, but a strenuous.

One part of the difficulty of prayer is recognised by Jesus over and over again. Men do not really *quite* believe that they will be answered—they are "of little faith." But He tells them with emphasis, in one form of words and another, driving it home into them, that "all things are possible with God"—"have faith in God." One can imagine how He fixes them with the familiar steady gaze, pauses, and, with the full weight of His personality in His words, and meaning them to give to His words the full value He intended, says: "Have faith in God." To see Him and to hear Him must have given that faith of itself. The reiteration, "Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you," even without the explanatory clause, makes evident to any one who attaches meaning to words Jesus' own conviction as to prayer. If the friend in the house to your knowledge has the loaves, you will knock till you get them; and has not God the gifts for you that you need? Is He short of the power to help?

It all comes back to Jesus' conception of God. Here, as elsewhere, we sacrifice far more than we dream by our lazy way of using His words without making the effort to give them His connotation. Will a father give his son a serpent instead of the fish for which he asks, a stone for bread? It is unthinkable; God—will God do less? It all goes back to the relation of father and child, to the love of God; only into the thought Jesus puts a significance

which we have not character or love enough to grasp. "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things," He says about the matters that weigh heaviest with us. Even if we suppose Luke's reference to the Father giving the Holy Spirit to those who ask, to owe something to the editor's hand—it was an editor with some Christian experience—it is clear that Jesus steadily implies that the heavenly Father has better things than food and clothing for His children. How much of a human father is available for his children? Is his giving limited to bread and fish and egg? Then will not the heavenly Father, Jesus suggests, give on a larger scale, and give Himself, in short—be available for the least significant of His own children in all His fulness and all His Fatherhood? And here we have to pause till we realise better what that Fatherhood implies and carries with it. Meanwhile, "fear not, little flock; it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." "The recurrence of the sweet and deep name Father unveils the secret of His being. His heart is at rest in God." [1] Rest in God is the very note of all His being, of all His teaching,—the keynote of all prayer, in His thought. "Our Father who art in heaven" our prayers are to begin—and perhaps they are not to go on till we realise what we are saying in that great form of speech. It is certain that as these words grow for us into the full stature of their meaning for Jesus, we understand in a more intimate way what the whole Gospel is in reality.

The writer to the Hebrews has here an interesting suggestion for us. Using the symbolism of the Hebrew religion and its tabernacle, he compares Jesus to the High Priest, but Jesus, he says, does not enter into the holiest alone. "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way

[1] H. R. Mackintosh, *The Person of Christ*, p. 399.

which He hath consecrated for us . . . let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith." In the previous chapter he discards the symbol and "speaks things,"—"Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." There he touches what has been the faith of the church throughout—that in Christ we reach the presence of God. Without saying so much in so many words, Jesus implies this in all His attitude to prayer. God is there, and God loves you, and loves to have you speak with Him. No one has ever believed this very much outside the radius of Christ's person and influence. It is, when we give the words full weight, an essentially Christian faith, and depends on our relation to Jesus Christ.

Jesus was quite explicit with His friends, in telling them they did not know what to ask, but He showed them Himself what they should ask. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness," He says, and He tells us to pray for the forgiveness of our sins and for deliverance from evil. Pray, too, "Thy kingdom come." "Pray ye the Lord of the harvest that He will send forth labourers into His harvest." In a crowning example, He tells Peter: "I prayed for *thee*." Identification with God's purposes—identification with the individual needs of those we love and those we ought to love—identification with the world's sin and misery—these seem to be His canons of prayer for us, as for Himself. For both in what He teaches others and in what He does Himself, He makes it a definite prerequisite of all prayer, that we say: "Thy will be done." Prayer is essentially dedication, deeper and fuller as we use it more and come more into the presence of God. Obedience goes with it; "we must cease to pray or cease to disobey," one or the other; and the choice, Jesus feels,

grows easier as we realize Him with whom we have to do.

"Ask and ye shall receive," He says; and if we have not obedience, or love, or faith, or any of the great things that make prayer possible, He suggests that we can ask for them and have them. The Gospel gives us an illustration in the man who prayed: "Lord, I believe: help Thou mine unbelief." But it is plain we have to understand that we are asking for great things, and it is to them rather than to the obvious little things that Jesus directs our thoughts. Not away from the little things, for if God is a real Father, He will wish to have His children talk them over with Him—"little things please little minds," yes, and great minds when the little minds are dear to them—but not little things all the time. There is variant to the saying about seeking first the kingdom of heaven, which Clement of Alexandria preserves. Perhaps it is a mere slip, but God, it has been said, can use misquotations; and with Clement's quotation, or misquotation, we may stop for the present. It certainly represents the thought of Jesus, and it may give us a hint for our own practice. "Ask, saith He, the great things, and the little ones will be added unto you."

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