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ARTICLE I.

REASON AND REVELATION.

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SINCE KANT wrote his famous *Critique of Reason*, the inquiry what the mind of man can do, and what it cannot do, and how it proceeds to do what it can do, what are the conditions and the limitations of its activity, has been introductory and fundamental to both philosophy and theology. MANSEL'S *Limits of Religious Thought*, and Sir WILLIAM HAMILTON'S *Lectures on Metaphysics*, have long since made us familiar with the claim that, as "to think is to condition," all our notions of the infinite and the absolute, all our knowledge of God, must be negative, yielding no positive result, mainly significant as emphasizing the constitutional and hopeless impotence of the human reason to originate a religion or to construct a theology.

The conclusion has been pressed into a double and antagonistic service. The impotence of reason has been supposed to prove the necessity of revelation, and the basis of Christianity has been sought in authority, instead of truth. The argument from miracles, in such a system, assumes the first place; and a

ARTICLE III.

PRAYER AND MIRACLE IN RELATION TO NATURAL LAW.

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THE objections to the Christian doctrine of prayer may be summed up under two heads: 1, *a priori*; that in the actual constitution of things answers to prayer are not possible; 2, *a posteriori*; that, possible or not, experience and observation show that they are not actually given, or at least show no evidence in favor of them. And the arguments against Answers to prayer, are applied *a fortiori* to Miracles.

The former argument may be thus stated in a syllogism:

Answers to prayer are possible only in case of such events as are not determined by a chain of anterior causes;

But all physical events, even those which seem most variable and capricious, are now known to be rigorously determined by a chain of anterior causes;

Therefore, answers to prayer concerning physical events are impossible.

This argument has had its most lucid and effective popular statement (as we might expect to find it) in the always lucid and interesting pages of Professor Tyndall, some of whose *Fragments of Science for Unscientific People* are really fragments of theology for untheological people,—and pretty poor theology at that, as might be expected from an eminent physicist operating outside of his specialty.

The second argument, that, as a matter of observation, ex-

periment and induction, it does not appear that prayers are actually answered, has had its most effective popular statement, perhaps, if not its strongest statement, in the challenge of a certain London medical professor to the Christian world to reduce the matter to a scientific demonstration by establishing a "prayer-gauge" in the form of a hospital in which some of the wards should be prayed for and other wards not prayed for, and a tally kept of the results—a challenge which does not seem to have met with a ready acceptance.

But after all, the formidable and crushing presentation of these difficulties with the doctrine of prayer is the *concrete* presentation of it in particular instances. Some experience of this has befallen every man who has ever tried to pray, and to whom when the disappointment of his entreaties has come, it has been more than disappointment or bereavement—it has seemed like the failure of a divine promise—like being bereaved of the Father in heaven. And when, at the end, it has been made clear that during all the time of earnest supplication, while the issue seemed uncertain, there never was any *real* uncertainty in the case, but only in his ignorance of it—that the causes of the fatal result were already inexorably fixed, during all those days of seeming suspense and earnest supplication—then it looks to the discouraged soul as if the divine promises to prayer had been not only a failure but a mockery. I am trying to put the case strongly. We need to take the full measure of the difficulty, before we begin to seek the explanation of it.

But, in fact, it is impossible to state a hypothetical case that shall be stronger than the actual case that was presented to the nation and the world not so very many months ago. None of us has forgotten it—how at the death of the President a darkness that could be felt came over all the land. Believers were ready to tremble as if the foundations of their faith had received a blow, and the voices of the scoffers were heard in open derision, saying 'Where is now your God?'

And why not?—in all fairness of argument, why not? We had just been claiming it as a warrant of our faith, and a proof of God's faithfulness, that from time to time our prayer seemed to be visibly answered in the improvement of the man whom we all loved. There were those who confessed themselves

awed and convinced by what they saw. Now, if our faith was to be confirmed by the visible answer to our prayers in the President's apparent convalescence, ought it not, in just so far, to be overthrown by the visible failure of our prayers in his death?

Furthermore, it appeared from the *post-mortem* examination that all along, from the very time of the shot, the wound had been, according to the laws of nature, inevitably fatal. The doubt, in which we all had been, arose simply from our ignorance of the conditions which death at last disclosed. There was no uncertainty in the nature of the case. The conclusion of it was foregone. Were not all our prayers, then, misplaced and nugatory? And since, as we are getting more and more to understand, physical results in general are exactly determined by anterior physical causes, is not all prayer, at least in such matters, useless and irrational? If the President had recovered, should we not have known, in the midst of our thanksgivings for answered prayer, that it was because the original wound was not fatal, and because the conditions, altogether, were favorable to recovery? In any such case, then, can there be profit in praying? Is there any good faith in the divine promises to prayer? Is there any trust to be placed in the words of our Lord Jesus Christ? And have we any Father in heaven?

And now, have I stated these difficulties in their full force? Can I say anything more to present the whole case against the promises of Jesus and the reasonableness of prayer, as drawn from the fixity of natural law and from failures of visible answer to prayer? If not—if the case is all in and its attorneys rest, then let us see what is to be said in reply. But first let us see what is *not* to be said. For there be sundry explanations which do not explain, but only betray their own case.

1. There is the explanation which represents that the answer to prayer consists in the change which the prayer produces in the man praying—not in any change outside of him. You do not bring circumstances into accordance with your wish; but you bring your mind into acquiescence in the circumstances, which is much the same. You are in the boat, pulling on the line that moors it. You try to pull the shore up to the boat, and though you do not succeed in this, you do pull

the boat up to the shore.¹ Your attempt to bring God to your will results in bringing you to God's will, and this amounts to the same thing substantially. The utility of prayer is vindicated, and yet all the difficulties are avoided.

What is the meaning of all this talk? That without believing in any real answer to prayer on God's part, I am to put myself through the insincere sham of asking and the pretence of expecting what I know will not be granted, in order that this detestable ritual of hypocrisy, this insult to the God of truth, this affront to the sincerity of my own conscience may have a salutary reaction on my own mind? Is this the morality of your new gospel of natural history?

But no! you do not mean this. You only mean that prayer is useful and salutary to those who engage in it with simple though deluded faith in its efficacy. But this does not much relieve your position, for you, the apostle of exact and positive truth, to hold that there may be something wholesome and salutary for the soul in a delusion and a falsehood. For shame! to be vaunting your doctrines of molecules, and correlations, as if it were of supreme concern for man to know the truth on such matters, but that in the affair of his personal relation to the Infinite God, a certain measure of mistake may be a good thing! These be wonderful spiritual guides—these new zealots for absolute truth!

2. And here is a second explanation that explains nothing;—it seems to be quite frankly tendered to us by Professor Tyndall, as a pleasant concession to religion:—that God may indeed answer prayers, but not for material favors—only for spiritual blessings. Everything in the material sphere is governed by fixed, invariable laws, and here prayer can avail nothing; but in the spiritual sphere God may consider the cravings and cries of his children without peril to the stability of his machine. To ask to be delivered from the bodily consequences of bodily wrong-doing—this, they say, would be

¹ The illustration is given, by remote recollection, from *Whately's Rhetoric*, and is more creditable to the Archbishop as rhetorician than as theologian. Thus also Professor Tyndall, as quoted by Dr. Littledale in the *Contemporary Review*, for August, 1872: "While Prayer is thus inoperative in external nature, it may react with beneficial power on the human mind," etc.

absurd. Bodily retribution must go inexorably forward; neither human supplication, nor the fatherly pity of God (if indeed God is a Father that can pity) can stay the course of it. But the damage wrought upon the soul by sin, the wounds and scars upon the conscience, the seeds of remorse that have been set breeding in the heart, the poison that infects the thoughts and corrupts the imagination—these are causes of which one might pray God to avert the consequences. As if there were no laws but laws of matter! As if there were no such thing as laws of mind! Nay, as if mind were not, according to their own wild doctrine, a mere physical function, subject to physical laws! They talk as if the promises of God, and the teachings of his Son, and the religious instincts of the soul, could be discredited over half the ground they cover, and yet remain unimpaired over the other half;—as if “give us our daily bread” might be proved a lie, and yet our faith be strong as ever when we say “forgive our debts” and “deliver us from evil.” No, no! we cannot keep one half the word of God and reject the other half.

3. One more inadequate explanation is offered us, often in a very pious spirit;—to wit, that the spirit of resignation is a necessary element in prayer; that every true prayer says, or means to say, “Nevertheless thy will, not mine, be done;” therefore there never is any failure of answer to prayer, for God’s will is always done. How plausible it sounds! I tell my children, “Put full confidence in my promise; whatever request you make of me (always remembering to say ‘if you please’) I will grant it.” So, the next time I come home they rush up to me with happy voices to name their request; and I answer, “All right. You ask for this ‘if I please;’ but I don’t please; so run away now; I have been as good as my word, haven’t I?” Does this strike you as quite satisfactory? If not, you are in a position to understand why this argument from “Thy will be done” is no sufficient answer to the grave perplexities which burden many earnest hearts in relation to the subject of prayer;—why it sounds to such hearts more like a subterfuge than like an explanation.

Such answers as these to the *a priori* argument of physical science against prayer may be grouped in the general category described in lawyers’ phrase as “confessing and avoiding.”

4. There remains another answer, which consists in denying the minor premise of the syllogism—in claiming that the sequence of cause and effect in the physical system is not constant, but is habitually interrupted by divine interference.

The objection to the former class of answers is that they are not answers at all, but a giving up of the case. They “confess” but do not succeed in “avoiding.” The objection to the latter is that it is untenable, or at least unmaintainable. If you can believe it yourself, you cannot get other people to believe it.

The answer which I propose to the syllogism is *Negatur major*. It is not true that in the case of events predetermined by anterior causes, prayer is unreasonable, nor a divine answer to it impossible. It is both possible that nature may be constant and prayer may be divinely fulfilled.

But how? On this point, the primary axioms or the undeniable conclusions of science seem to stand confronting the first principles of religion,—the most unambiguous utterances of Jesus Christ, and where can we find relief from the impending collision?

Simply in this: that the collision which always seems impending never comes. The axioms of science are true—the stability of law, the persistence of force, the sequency of causes; and the promises of God are true, and blessed is every one that putteth his trust in Him. The impending collision between them is like the crash which timid by-standers fear, when, in some enormous engine, huge masses of ponderous metal are heaved up one towards another, as if about to collide in shock and ruin; but, geared with consummate art, they do but touch each other with the gentlest kiss, and turn back with precise obedience each into its place again. The kingdom of nature and the kingdom of grace are one kingdom of one King. They are two parts of one enginery, and we need have no misgivings lest the Maker of it should have miscalculated the proportions and the fittings, and his faithfulness to his promises be found irreconcilable with his constancy to his steadfast laws.

Now, in order to come to a clearer understanding of how these things can be, let me step aside from the argument, and tell a story of personal reminiscence the bearing of which will appear by-and-by.

Many years ago, in my boyhood, I travelled in company with a missionary and his family from Beirût on the coast of Syria, across the plains and rolling hills of Mesopotamia, and down the swift Tigris to the torrid site of ancient Nineveh. It was a difficult and even a perilous journey for that slender, fragile man and his invalid wife and two infant children; but it was a journey "begun, continued and ended in God." How well I remember that parting Lord's Supper with the company of missionaries at Beirût, and the prayer in which my father uttered Moses' petition: 'If thy presence go not with them, carry them not up hence!' As we fared slowly along the way once trodden westward by Abraham, father of believers, the wilderness and the solitary place were glad because of us. Each morning when the tents were struck, we knelt together in the desert to ask the protecting care of Abraham's God, and then, as the little caravan moved toward the sunrise, we sang together, in the old tune of "Leyden":

"So Abraham, by divine command,
Left his own house, to walk with God."

After weeks of patient journeying, through perils of sickness and perils of robbers, we rested within the black walls of famous old Diarbekir on the upper Tigris, and there waited for the goat-skin rafts that were to float us down the river.

While we were delayed here, a courier arrived with letters, and among them a very painful one to our missionary friend, dated at Canton, China, that had gone by way of London and New York and then across the Atlantic again to Beirût, and thence to this Turkish city on the Tigris. It contained the news that his brother, a missionary in China, was suffering under an attack of fever that threatened his life. Here was a new burden laid on our poor friend, who was already bravely bearing his many troubles; and whither could he go with such an anxiety as this? Should he pray that the danger might be averted? But long before this, the danger must have been passed, on the one side or the other, and the result must have been sealed up among past events, which even Omnipotence cannot change. Was it right to be delivered from a sorrow that was future *to him*, even though the fact must have

been decided months before, on the other side of the world? We used to talk over the question as we shot down the Tigris rapids between the cavernous cliffs, or moored our rafts at night under thickets of pomegranates and oleanders. And it grew clear before my mind that in our dealings with Him who inhabiteth eternity, to whom there is no future and no past, we need take no account of considerations of time. When He hears the cry of his children and rewards their prayer, He will take care of its consistency with the order of his own acts; we need give ourselves no concern about the matter. To a philosophical—to a reasonably intelligent—mind, there need be no difficulty in the thought that the issue of that disease on the shore of the Pacific may have been determined—predetermined before the earth was—with reference to the believing prayer of a tired missionary, uttered months afterward on the banks of the Tigris. And when, a little later, amid the sultry heats of Músul, he received tidings that his brother was recovering, it was not difficult to recognize in this the answer to that *ex post facto* prayer which, reasonable or not, he could not help praying in the hour of his anxiety.

Now in stating this case, I have stated the utmost imaginable case of difficulty concerning the doctrine of prayer. The difficulty derived from the invariableness of natural law is a slight one in comparison. The objection to prayer from the immutability of nature, which physical science brings up to us as if it were some new thing, is not so formidable as the objection from the immutability of God, which is as old as theology. But here is a stronger case than either, when our prayer concerns some event, unknown to us, which must have been decided already, so that Omnipotence itself cannot make it not to have been. And if prayer is not absurd and unreasonable in this case, it is impossible, with all the resources of science or metaphysics, to construct a case in which it shall be unreasonable—a case that shall be too hard for God, or too hard for the faith of his children. If God can determine an event from eternity with reference to a prayer that will be uttered far down in the ages of time, He can certainly arrange the antecedents and causes of the event also in advance. He who from the beginning has foreseen my prayer, and has in-

tended the answer to it, may well have adjusted, in his everlasting counsels, the chain of causes and effects in which the answer has its place.

Hear a parable. A certain man had two sons, one of whom was wise and one was foolish. Then he placed at school, and promised them gifts at Christmas on condition of their writing the week before, to remind him of the promise. And soon after this he went into a far country, from which he would be obliged to start the gifts, to be in time for Christmas, earlier than the arrival of these letters of the week before. So he said to himself, 'I know just how it will be with those two boys. The elder is faithful and punctual. It is safe for me to express the parcel to his address. And the other boy is negligent and indolent, and, what is worse, he does not really believe my word. I know he will not write; therefore I will send him a letter explaining to him how it was that he failed of receiving a gift.' When the week before Christmas came, the younger boy made game of his brother for writing, saying that he had studied the time-tables, and had found that it was quite too late for a letter to make any difference; that if the package was coming, it must be on the way already; and if it was not at that moment actually aboard of the train and *en route*, not all the letter-writing in the world would put it aboard. Christmas morning came, and only one package was delivered at the door. Still he was confident that writing made no difference. The package must have started before the letter arrived. But when, by-and-by, instead of a gift, he got his father's letter, he was observed to be much less jocular and more pensive. However, the professor of physics in the school comforted him with the latest edition of Appletons' Railroad Guide, showing him from the time-tables that he had not been in the least to blame.¹

I ask the reader carefully to consider and reconsider this statement: that the difficulties attendant on the Christian doctrine of Prayer, and the related doctrines of Providence and Miracle are very largely difficulties in which Theology has gratuitously involved itself by blunders of definition.

¹ The parable is defective in that it represents the father as acting from conjectural or probable foresight of the action of the younger son. If we suppose him to be possessed of "foreknowledge absolute," the analogy is amended.

1. We are in the habit of defining a *miracle* as an *interruption of natural order or law*. It is a false definition. A *miracle* means simply a *wonder*. It is so called, not by reason of its relation to the laws of nature, but by reason of its relation to the minds of men. It is not an after-thought of God, nor an expedient on God's part to meet an unexpected emergency. It starts out sudden, astounding, upon our vision; but it has lain in the purposes of eternal Wisdom, from the beginning or ever the earth was. Now if predetermined, why not prepared? If foreseen, why not arranged aforetime? And if so arranged and fitted invisibly into the framework of natural causes, is it any the less a miracle, when at last the human exigency arrives, and at the very moment of the need, the divine wonder flashes forth upon the eye?

When

"The pitchy cloud
Of locusts, warping on the eastern wind,"

Came forth at the waving of

"The rod of Amram's son,"

And

"Darkened all the land of Nile,"

The frightened Pharaoh saw that it was a miracle. Now suppose that the magicians of Egypt, finding their craft in danger, had bestirred themselves to discredit this notable miracle. Suppose they had sent out a commission into the desert to find where this unprecedented cloud of locusts had been gendered; and that these had come back in triumph, bringing handfuls of the dry pupa-cases which they had scooped up from the desert sands, and flung them down before Pharaoh and said, "Miracle, forsooth! See there!" Would it have been any the less a miracle for all that? Would the miracle have been one whit the less miraculous, if they had been able to trace the genealogy of every locust in the cloud, through all its generations, back to the original grasshopper that nibbled the leaves of Paradise?

If ever there was a notable miracle related, is it not the story of the downfall of the walls of Jericho at the sounding of the trumpets? When I visited the Jordan valley, there were the walls of Tiberias lying as flat as ever the walls of Jericho lay. That whole valley is scarred with such ruin wrought by earth-

quake. Is it essential to the miraculousness of the downfall of Jericho, that this should not have been caused by one of them? If the progress of seismology should by-and-by show in detail the long chain of geologic causes beginning with the first congealing of the earth's crust, working in long sequence through immeasurable cycles, lying silent and hidden in deep veins and fissures of the nether rocks, there waiting as in ambush through the generations of history, and at last, without one hair's-breadth deviation from the course of physical law, at the exact point in space, at the cry of the trumpets, at the shout of the marching warriors, springing forth in devastation,—would this make the fact less miraculous, or magnificently more so?

I claim acknowledgment, then, that a violation of the order of nature is no necessary part of the definition of a miracle. And if not, still less is it part of the definition of answer to prayer. It is no part of a reasonable Christian theology, but only a blunder by which uninstructed faith plays into the hands of unbelieving science, to hold that an answer to prayer implies an after-thought of God or a modification of his plans and arrangements. With God are no after-thoughts.¹

The keenest, brightest utterance of unbelief concerning prayer is found, where we might expect to find it, in some of the fluent couplets of POPE'S *Essay on Man*:

“ Think we, like some weak prince, th' Eternal Cause
 Prone for his favorites to reverse his laws?
 Shall burning Etna, if a sage requires,
 Forget to thunder, and recall her fires?
 On air or sea new motions be impressed,
 O blameless Bethel, to relieve thy breast?
 When the loose mountain trembles from on high,
 Shall gravitation cease, if thou go by?”

The most childlike faith may freely answer all these questions in the negative. The simplest Alpine peasant, over

¹ This argument (not the illustrations) is said by Maimonides to have been held by some of the elder Rabbins—a quarter toward which one does not commonly look in search of rationalizing expositions. See Note in SMITH'S *Bible Dictionary*, Article “Miracles,” together with the opening remarks of Bishop Fitzgerald, the author of the Article.

I remember, in Lord NUGENT'S *Lands, Classical and Sacred*, how that author was shocked with the rationalism of Dr. Robinson, who pointed out a shallow in the

whose religious credulity the famous English professor, in his annual Swiss vacation-ramble, grows genially hilarious, need not take the other side. "When the loose mountain trembles from on high," and house, and home, and children and wife, all, with his own life, are in jeopardy from the horrors of the impending land-slide, he groans, he shouts, he cries, he prays to God for deliverance,—and so would Professor Tyndall or Mr. Galton. And when by-and-by the awful storm and crash of the ruining masses have ceased, and he ventures to look forth on the scene of desolation, and realizes that his cottage is still safe, and his children sleeping unharmed and undisturbed in their beds, in the simplicity of a trusting soul he lifts up his thanks to God who has heard his prayer in peril, and delivered him with so great a deliverance. It is all very well for the scientific gentleman from London to come up to his side, and with a fine superiority explain to him that there has really been no intervention, no interruption of the laws of nature,—that the causes which determined the path of the land-slide are not of recent origin—the jutting crag that caught and swerved it aside, the stretch of loose sand through which it plowed heavily with retarded motion, the swell of land that checked it at last, just as it seemed on the point of overwhelming the good man's dwelling—that all these conditions had been fixed from of old, that they were of ancient geologic formation, and that the devastating masses had only obeyed the law of gravitation and followed the line of least resistance. But it is in vain. At such a time the spirit of an honest man ought to be not only glad but grateful, and will be. Look at them side by side, the philosopher and the peasant, and say whether of the twain is the type of a nobler manhood, of a truer instinct of duty, nay! of a sounder philosophy—the philosopher, glibly pattering of

bay of Suez, at the place of the probable crossing of the Hebrews, which might have coöperated with the "strong east wind blowing all night" (*Exod.*, xiv, 21) to secure the result. But I have never been able distinctly to apprehend wherein the mention of a shallow in the bay should necessarily be more painful to the pious mind than the mention of a strong east wind.

Of course, in this writing, I expect to be understood by some people, and represented by some others, as arguing that all miracles are to be explained by natural causes; whereas my sole contention is this: that an interruption of natural causes is not essential to the idea of a miracle.

the Unknowable, and of formations and friction and gravitation, and saying "Oh, my dear man, there has been no deliverance, no hearing of prayer, nothing to be grateful for, nothing but laws of nature; don't pray, there's a good fellow; don't give thanks, don't be grateful; it is only your good luck, you know:"—or the peasant, kneeling there upon the threshold of his uninjured home, lifting up his eyes and hands to heaven in thankfulness to say: "I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and delivered him out of all his troubles."

I am not afraid to claim that the answer thus made to the argument against prayer and miracle, derived from the fixity of natural law, and the persistence of force, is a solid and sufficient answer. The objection comes to us in a new form, in modern times, illustrated by the superb demonstrations of the persistence of matter and the conservation and correlation of forces. But it is not substantially a new objection; and no improvement in scientific demonstration will ever be able to present this argument from the predetermination and immutability of nature in nearly so formidable a shape as its old shape of an argument from the foreordination and immutability of God. If theology and practical religion have been able, through all these millenniums, to hold steadfastly to the doctrine of prayer, while keeping in view the tremendous fact of the immutability of God, they may be much at their ease as to any objections that will ever be brought forth from the fact of the immutability of nature.

But this answer has, of course, only a negative value. It only proves, in answer to the plausible argument of scientific infidelity, that prayer is not necessarily absurd, nor answer to prayer impossible.

'A small thing to claim,' you say, 'to have proved that this, the vital centre of all religion, is not a sheer impossibility!'

Well, small thing or great thing, it is an indispensable thing to do, at a time when this very objection to prayer is so persistently pushed, in literature, in public discourse, and in men's common talk—when it is painfully felt by souls that love and long to pray, and that encounter it thrusting its ugly shape between them and God, and laying its cadaverous hand upon

their lips when they would say "Our Father which art in heaven." 'A small thing,' you say, 'to prove that prayer is not impossible.' But to such souls as these, it is enough. Take away this one hindrance, and to them the rest proves itself. The craving need of their lives is an argument for prayer; the thirst of their souls after the living God is an argument; and the strong instinct of their childlike faith is to them "the evidence of things not seen."

But now we come to another argument against Prayer, one which, I think, makes itself far more widely and deeply felt in common minds—the Argument, as we may call it, from Experience and Induction. Conceding the former point, that answer to prayer is not impossible, it puts the question very pertinaciously and inexorably, 'After all, is prayer *actually* answered? Can you show me a positive, unmistakable, demonstrable case of an event taking place in answer to prayer which you can prove would not have taken place without prayer? Can you show, by a large statistical induction, any authenticated averages or percentages that tend to prove the effectiveness of prayer? Are you prepared to deny that there are instances of manifest failure of prayers to be answered? And if so, what is the value of the alleged divine promise?'

Our thoughts naturally turn back to those eighty days of universal sorrow, fear and anxiety, and continual prayer to God, while our beloved Garfield lay and languished of his wound. If ever there were sincere, united, believing prayers for a distinct object, it was during those eighty days. If ever there was a definite, apparent failure and defeat of prayer, it was when those eighty days were ended. It seemed a crucial experiment. We had bidden the world look and see the result, and were ready to claim the recovery of the President as a proof of the power of prayer;—and he did not recover. The experiment failed. And it can hardly be said that the American pulpit appeared to great advantage in its efforts to explain the matter.

Shrewd people will warn me that I am not bettering my case any when I go on to say that in that public disappointment there was no new trial of our faith—that the like trial had befallen each one of us severally, many a time, in our personal

experience. In fact, it is so far from being a new thing, that the same failure is lamented and bitterly complained of by Jeremiah, and Asaph, and David, and many another man after God's own heart, as long ago as the days of the Old Testament. The complaints of failure stand face to face, in the *Psalter*, with the most unreserved assurances of the divine promise. Perhaps this doesn't help the case. But I am not trying, just now, to improve the appearance of the case. I want to know just how bad the case is, without disguise or mitigation.

But alongside of these depressing, but perfectly open and notorious facts, observe these other facts which stand in such curious contrast with them: 1, That in spite of it all the habit of prayer continues among men undiminished, even among intelligent and reasonable men; 2, That the very persons who have prayed with the deepest earnestness, with the most sincere, affectionate and submissive faith, and who have suffered the most signal and grievous disappointments in prayer, do somehow never seem, in the long-run, to get discouraged about praying. Their faith is "cast down, but not destroyed;" and presently it comes up again, braver and stronger than ever. According to my observation, the most solid confidence in prayer is to be found in those who have had deep and bitter experience of disappointment in prayer; that these are just the people who are most unmistakably convinced of the faithfulness of God toward them, as a prayer-hearing and covenant-keeping God. A strange fact, isn't it? How do you explain it? May it not be that there is something in the personal relations between them and God, which, if we could know it, would throw light on the matter? This certainly we are compelled to admit,—looking on the unreserved content of such souls, who declare, in the face of all failures and disappointments, their full satisfaction with God's dealing with them in his covenant of prayer—that if they are content, and God is content, it is not for us to step in between the contracting parties with any complaints of ours. There are many such cases on record—as of one who cried, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" "Why art Thou so far from helping me?" "O my God, I cry in the daytime, but Thou hearest not. . . . *But Thou art holy*, O Thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel." And then (among

others) is the case of Paul, who thrice besought the Lord to be healed of an infirmity, and received for answer only this word, "My grace is sufficient for thee,"—but who never seems to have thought that his prayer had not been answered—and more, and who went praying on in faith more strong than ever.

In one shape or other, sometimes in a shape most unforeseen but always to their full satisfaction, the answer to prayer comes, slowly, perhaps, but comes always, to teachable, trustful souls, who wait patiently for the Lord. But it is not with such as these, only, that we have to do. Their interior personal experience may satisfy them, but it cannot be expected to satisfy those who stand looking on from outside, questioning in cool earnestness, doubting but not scoffing, demanding the truth, and the proof of it. They ask for positive knowledge—for something of the nature of scientific demonstration, in a matter of such vital interest as the matter of prayer to God; and are we prepared to give it? It has been called for with no small importunity and plausibility by some scientific men: they have even proposed the form of the test or "prayer-gauge" that would be satisfactory to them. And what answer can be made to this challenge? Are we able to present any scientific proof of the power of prayer, that will stand the customary tests of inductive logic, such as scientific men are accustomed to apply and accept?

Frankly, I doubt whether we can. And further, it would be strange and out of the common course of things if we could. It would be an exception to the order of the universe; and that, certainly, is not the thing for a *scientific* mind to expect or demand. For when the highest science comes to observe physical facts in their moral relations, it finds this method pervading the whole system of nature—that the things most remote from human control and from practical human concern are most capable of being fully and exactly known; the things that most concern human life, that come nearest to human hearts and souls, are so inscrutable in their nature, or so vastly complex in their relations, that we cannot confidently calculate upon them,—we are compelled to act on probabilities or on presumptions. The things that are far away, we comprehend; the things

nearest at hand are bewildering. We understand the mechanism of the stars; the mechanism of the weather confounds us. We can calculate an eclipse or a planetary conjunction centuries ahead; but we cannot compute a thunder-storm from week to week, or be sure of fair weather three days in advance. The chemistry of rocks, and soils, and gases, is simple enough; but in proportion as things are found higher and higher in the scale of organic life, the more perplexed becomes the chemical composition of them. "Complications increase according as the objects attain a higher degree of organization, and become greatest of all in the bodily frame of man, and in that frame, in the nervous system, the part most intimately connected with the functions of the mind."¹ But chemistry, after all, even in these most complicated applications of it, is at least an exact science. Medicine, on the other hand, which takes up the same sort of study and carries it one stage nearer to humanity, becomes at once a science of probabilities and uncertainties. "Doctors disagree" and err in diagnosis and prognosis; and small wits think it a fine thing to banter the physician and his science with what is the characteristic of the profoundly obscure and intricate subject of the science, which excludes exactness of knowledge from many of its applications. We can have precise demonstration about many things that are of minor importance to us; but when our child is in the agony of diphtheria, or the torpor of typhoid, we have to grope our way by conjecture, and do the thing that may perhaps be the wrong thing to do, but which on the whole, according to the best judgment that we can make, seems most likely to be the right one.

Nowhere has this characteristic in the order of the world been so distinctly pointed out as by the leader and founder of the Positive Philosophy, Auguste Comte. It is the basis of that classification of the sciences which is the pride of his great system.²

¹ McCOSH, *Divine Government, Physical and Moral*.

² *Philosophie Positive*, tom. I, p. 96. Dividing philosophy into five fundamental sciences, he says: "La première [l'astronomie] considère les phénomènes les plus généraux, les plus simples, les plus abstraits, et les plus éloignés de l'humanité. . . . Les phénomènes considérés par la dernière [la physique sociale] sont, au contraire, les plus particuliers, les plus compliqués, les plus con-

And this, which is the prevailing principle in the physical world, is still more conspicuously true in the moral world. As the apostle of atheistic science remarks,—when we pass over from Biology to Sociology, we have to leave demonstrative methods and precise conclusions behind us. In the moral world, everything is matter of probability. Nothing is certain, in the physical sense of the word. A “moral certainty” means a high degree of probability—not a mathematical demonstration. And this sort of certainty—a “moral certainty,” which means an uncertainty—is the only certainty that we have to act upon in questions of duty. Whether we like it or not, that is the way the world is made for us. In business affairs, the faculty of success is the faculty of promptly and wisely striking the balance of probabilities. The man who acts only on certainties does not act at all until it is too late. We have general rules to go by, but not universal rules, that have no exception. “Honesty is the best policy” is a sound business maxim; but it does not mean that there is not many a fine fortune built up by lying and fraud. The questions of friendship and love, on which our lives turn, have to be decided on probabilities; and those solemn questions of public justice in which the citizen is sometimes required literally to decide on the life or death of a fellow-man who sits trembling before him in the dock, have to be decided in the same way. We do not know, to a demonstration, but we are “satisfied beyond a reasonable doubt” (whatever that vague law-phrase may mean) and so we go forward and say the word that takes away the life of a fellow-being. We have to do it. It is right to do it. It is wrong—it is a sin against society and against God, if we refuse to do it. Here is one of the most impressive illustrations of the general principle, that in the highest concerns of human nature we are compelled to act without demonstration, on probabilities, not certainties. It is the know-nothing “Positive Philosophy” that points out this impressive fact in the system of the world, in which we so clearly recognize a divine method for the education of humanity.

crets, et les plus directement intéressants pour l'homme. . . . Entre ces deux extrêmes, les degrés de spécialité, de complication et de personnalité des phénomènes vont graduellement en augmentant.” See, further, pp. 101, 102.

And now, as men trace this ascending scale in the organization of life, of human nature, of human society, and find, as they rise from the inferior to the higher concerns of the soul and of the race, that they get further and further away from physical and mathematical certainties, and are compelled more and more to act on probabilities,—is it their expectation that when they arrive at the summit and crown of all, the relation between man and God, they will find this principle suddenly reversed?—that God and prayer, and faith and providence will be matter of experiment, and gauging and quantitative analysis? In all these other matters—sickness, business, friendship, love, justice, conscience—they are content to decide on probabilities, and while not seeing, nevertheless to act as if seeing, things that are invisible—to walk by faith, not by sight. As they ascend, stair by stair, from the plane of mere mechanism, they find this law asserting itself more and more emphatically; and at the topmost step—the tremendous step that leads from man to God—they turn suddenly on the heel and face backwards, and say, ‘Give us a prayer-gauge—a scientific test! Show us the Father and it sufficeth us! Show us some properly attested instance of answer to prayer—of an event taking place as a consequence of prayer, which clearly and demonstrably would not have taken place without prayer, and we will believe.’

If I were to answer according to its folly this demand of positive philosophers for that which on the face of it is inconsistent with the Positive Philosophy, I should say to them “Show me the prayer, and I will show you the answer to it.” And doubtless they would go on to show it to me. And what is this, forsooth, that you are displaying? Bent knees, hands clasped and wringing, lifted eyes streaming with tears,—sighs, sobs, groans, ejaculations, words of petition and entreaty—do you call this a *prayer*? Well, doubtless in one sense of the word it is a prayer—in the sense in which the word is used by a stage-manager. It is an opera-prayer. But in any true sense of the word there may be prayer without anything of this, and there may be all this without prayer. You can’t show me a prayer; you can’t see it; you can’t hear it; you can’t weigh it; you can’t exhibit it by a chemical re-action, nor by an electrometer. You know its presence not by demonstration, but by a

strong conviction, as you know of love, friendship, justice, conscience. And if you cannot put your finger on the act of prayer, and say *there it is*, how much less can you find and demonstrate the answer to it, and the connection between prayer and answer, and prove that the event would not have been but for the prayer! You find no difficulty here that is different in kind from those that beset you in medical science, and in social science; you only find the like difficulty (as you might expect) in a stronger form. This is the perplexing and baffling thing in the study of medicine, that only in exceptional cases can one say of a certainty 'this was what did it; that change would not have followed if this treatment had not been adopted.' We don't certainly know, in such cases. It is ordered, in matters of life and death, and still more in matters of social duty and morality, and most of all in the religious relation between man and God, that we walk amid many uncertainties and be disciplined by doubts—that we walk by faith—not by sight. And it is ordered wisely, as even we can see. If it were otherwise—if the rewards of virtue, the answers to prayer were invariably visible to all, capable of demonstration to the senses, and of being set forth beyond the possibility of question in statistical tables, there is danger that both virtue and prayer would cease to be. Faith would vanish away. Prayer would become mere incantation; and piety and morality degenerate into selfish calculation. Once let it be demonstrated to the universal conviction that always and in all its results, both remote and immediate, "honesty is the best policy," and thenceforward you have no more honest men, but only politic men who know too much to injure their own prospects and their own immediate advantage. Doubtless it would be a better world, in some respects, if it were a world with prayer-gauges and compensatory balances for righteousness and charity. It would be a world with less vice in it,—and very little virtue;—a world without profaneness or ungodliness,—and without piety or holiness. Possibly it might not be so much better a world, after all, for such a race as ours to live in.

It is not reasonable, then, it is not even scientific, to expect physical and statistical demonstrations of the Power of Prayer. There is an anterior presumption against any attempt to furnish

such a demonstration, no matter where it comes from,—whether it is an account of the results of the Fulton Street Prayer-meeting, or a volume of reports of intercessions at Lourdes and La Salette.

But is there no positive and trustworthy evidence that we can trust on this subject? If faith may not demand demonstration, it does need *something* to go upon. What evidence have we that God hears and answers prayer?

1. We have the universal instinctive craving of the soul for prayer. I know with what a sneer this argument will be met on the part of 'positive' philosophers, who are apt to be more positive than certain. And yet this argument, which is the scorn of positive science, is of just the same sort with that which, in the last resort, is the final appeal of science itself—an instinctive craving for order and law, an instinctive cognition of the sequence of cause and effect, an instinctive conviction of the constancy of natural law. On such postulates as these, Science has climbed to her splendid achievements, and having attained thereto, scornfully kicks down the ladder on which she climbed, with sneers at spiritual instincts and cravings. But will Science give a reason why the thirsting of the soul after the living God is not as worthy a test of truth as the thirst for a wider induction and a more comprehensive classification? I put in this universal impulse of the human race to pray to God in its moments of need, as testimony to the divine warrant of prayer. God has not put this within us to delude us. He does not say to his children, Seek ye my face in vain.

2. There is the fact, hardly to be denied, even by the very fanaticism of unbelief, that the practice of prayer (I do not mean religious reverie or rhapsody, but petition to God and trust in Him) does minister to the noblest and fairest growths of human character; and, on the other hand, that the disuse and loss of prayer out of the life tends, ordinarily, to the debasement of the tone of manhood and womanhood. Since, then, it is not to be believed that falsehood can be salutary, we conclude that this salutary thing is true.

3. There is the common testimony of believers, of whatever different lands and ages, who have spent their lives in habitual prayer, that prayer has not been in vain to them, but that, in

full retrospect of all that has seemed to them like disappointment and sore trial of faith, and to others like the manifest failure of the divine promise,—nevertheless, they are satisfied of the unfailing faithfulness of God's dealings with them. I offer their testimony for what it is worth—the testimony of the most suffering, grieved, unsuccessful, disappointed of God's children, to whom the world points as examples of the uselessness of prayer, but whom it dare not call as its own witnesses for the impeachment of the divine faithfulness. I offer it, I say, for what it is worth. It is very incomplete, doubtless; we have but a few instances out of the ten thousand times ten thousand. It is open to the imputation of being one-sided—of reporting the coincidences and confirmations, and saying nothing about the failures. Agreed. I said it would not be conclusive. But it is relevant, and it is credible. Weigh it, each man for himself, and take it for what it is worth.

And then set over against it, or on the same side of the account, as the case may be, whatever balance you may find, after comparing the results of your observation, and of other men's observation, of the course of the world—the notable and impressive alleged answers to prayer, the signal alleged failures of prayer. You will find, as soon as you leave the testimony of personal experience, and enter the domain of general observation, the elements of possible error are multiplied to a perplexing degree, and you will feel only a very limited confidence in your totals and averages and balances. But whatever the result may be, give it whatever weight it is entitled to.

4. Finally, I think that you will come, at the end of your studies and questionings, to decide the matter, in your own mind, by the weight of *authority*, if so be that you know of any authority that might be considered as decisive on such a subject.

You dislike this way of settling the question, perhaps. You prefer to hold your views on this point, as on scientific subjects, as the result of independent inquiry, and conviction by evidence. But, my dear sir, you do not hold your scientific opinions in any such way as you think you do. No matter how thorough and independent you think yourself, the great body of your opinions is taken by you on the authority of others. This is

true even in matters of mathematical evidence. If any man living might be presumed to have the time, the occasion, the taste, and preëminently the ability, to know the truth about the fundamental principles of his science, it should be that great mathematician, Mr. Airy, astronomer-royal at Greenwich. But he declares that he does not know, of his personal knowledge, the truth of the Copernican system; that he has never followed through the demonstrations of the *Principia* to satisfy himself about them; that he takes them on faith—on the authority of the great Newton, corroborated by the assent of successive astronomers who have wrought on that foundation, and have found it a firm and good basis for their work.¹

If we could know, anywhere among the sons of men, one preëminent for knowledge, insight, just discernment in spiritual things, as the great Newton in physical and mathematical,—one whose acute penetration into the spiritual facts of man warrant our confidence in him when he declares to us the truth concerning God,—who speaks of heavenly things, and men wonder because he speaks as one having authority, and believe on him that he is in God and God in him; if we should hear such a one as this declare with authoritative reiteration that “men ought always to pray and not to faint,” should hear him instruct us after what manner we ought to pray, and listen to the declaration which he boldly makes, as of his own knowledge, that God will reward the prayer of his people, though He bear long with them; if we should find these declarations of authority to have been tried by the unreserved confidence of successive generations of disciples, through the sorest trials of their faith, in suffering, and poverty, and martyrs’ deaths, practising on his precepts and resting on his promises, and ever testifying that they are “yea and amen,” “faithful and true;”—*then* we should have, not, indeed, an explanation that would satisfy our reason, but a firm and solid basis for our faith.

This is the one argument that I have to offer—the authority of Christ on the testimony of his church. I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

¹ I am obliged to quote from recollection. The statement is made in one of the Essays prefixed to the Eighth Edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

But let me take time to answer a question from a "practical man," who has been wanting for some time to put just one question :

"Do you really believe, Mr. Bacon, that if you pray and I don't pray, your affairs will turn out any better than mine? This brings the matter down to a practical point. As an honest, candid man, do you *really believe* it?"

I answer, I cannot certainly foretell. It is as if you should ask: 'If you are scrupulously honest and upright, and I shrewdly lie and cheat, will you prosper and succeed while I break down and die a poor man?' I do not know. It does not always turn out so; as Job found, and as Asaph in *Psalms*, lxxiii, found, and as the author of *Ecclesiastes* found. It is more often so than not. And when the general rule seems to fail, it is the general rule, still. Honesty *is* the best policy, though I might be puzzled to give you a statistical demonstration of it. And never shall I be more sure of it, than when, after years of upright, honest toil, I walk the streets in seedy garments, a failure, an unsuccessful old man, and catch your eye as you whirl by me in your carriage. Honesty is the best policy, still—always. I know the rule, now; and some time I shall understand the exceptions.

Just so with the other question: 'If you pray, and I don't, will your affairs *turn out* better than mine?' I do not certainly know. It does not uniformly turn out so, in any two given cases. It may be you will go to the end of your long life marked by the world as a successful and happy man. Never a prayer for daily bread in all your house; and yet your table is spread with daily abundance, while I live from hand to mouth on poor and meagre fare. Never a petition for guidance in doubt, or blessing on the work of your hands, but your grounds bring forth plentifully, and your ship comes in full-freighted, and your investments never fail, and your bank account is the envy of the town. Never a supplication goes up from your lips when they whom you love are sick; but skilled physicians, and rare and costly medicines are at your command, and all the healing climates of the earth are as if at your door, and you put your trust in nothing higher than these; but your sick recover, and your home is bright with congratulations in which there

mingles no thought of thankfulness to God;—and meanwhile sickness comes to my house, the home of daily prayer, where silent thankfulness for every daily mercy burns like the perpetual flame before an altar;—and over the dear form so racked with anguish or wasting with slow decay, I pour out my soul to God, an hourly sacrifice, and pray, and hope, and wait,—and wait in vain. On goes the course of the disease, inexorable as if under a mechanic law; and at last the beloved one is torn from my heart, and I lay the dear, marred body in the earth, and sit down alone and desolate in the silent house, and the unbelievers ask each other, under their breath, “Where is now his God?” and “What profit shall we have, if we pray unto Him?”

Do not such things happen? Yes, thank God, they do! Thank God, who does not so bind himself to the letter of our petition but that we can trust Him not to answer our crying to our own ruin—can trust Him to withhold as well as to give; else no man would dare to pray. Thank God, who can be *better* than his word, and do for us exceeding abundantly *above* all that we ask or think, making all things work together for our good, and changing sorrow into an “eternal weight of glory;”—who to the soul that waiteth for Him, with long persistent patience that is born of steadfast faith, at last reveals the meaning of his strange way, making light to spring forth out of darkness, until, how perplexed soever each may be concerning all the rest, each for himself sees and understands and glorifies the loving-kindness of the Lord towards him, so that from among the multitude of His redeemed ones, now so often perplexed, bewildered, long waiting for the light that long delays, there shall be at last no voice wanting in the chorus that shall “stand upon the sea of glass having the harps of God,” singing “the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, ‘Just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints!’”