

THE  
POWER OF PRAYER,

ILLUSTRATED IN THE

WONDERFUL DISPLAYS

OF DIVINE GRACE AT THE FULTON STREET AND OTHER MEETINGS  
IN NEW YORK AND ELSEWHERE, IN 1857 AND 1858.

BY

SAMUEL IRENÆUS PRIME.

AUTHOR OF "TRAVELS IN EUROPE AND THE EAST," "THOUGHTS ON THE DEATH OF  
CHILDREN," "HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH BIBLE, ABRIDGED," ETC., ETC.

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

## PRAYER SHOWN TO BE EFFICACIOUS.

BY REV. WM. S. PLUMER, D.D., LL.D.

I HAVE been requested by the author of this volume to write something on prayer, particularly on the relation between the prayer and the answer, illustrated by facts ancient or modern.

There is not on earth any form of religion that does not include prayer. It may be corrupt in doctrine, morals and worship, but it cannot be a religion and dispense with prayer.

It is not possible to over-estimate the value of prayer. For more than thirty-five years I have had much intercourse with dying saints and sinners of various ages and conditions. In all that time I have not heard one express regret that he had spent too much time in prayer; I have heard many mourn that they had so seldom visited a throne of grace.

There can be no true piety without a devotional spirit. He, whose soul does not thirst after God, and

seek fellowship with him, is an entire stranger to vital godliness.

Prayer is efficacious. It has power with God. It averts sore judgments. It brings great blessings. Nothing that men can do has so vast an influence. This can be proven in many ways.

The Scriptures expressly say so. "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me;" "Every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened;" "The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." Often does God's word say as much.

It also records very clear and remarkable answers to prayer in the cases of Abraham, of Jacob, of Joseph, of Moses, of Joshua, of Hannah, of David, of Asa, of Elijah, of Elisha, of Isaiah, of Hezekiah, of Mordecai of Nehemiah, of Paul and Silas, and of many others.

And God's honor is as much involved in answering the prayers indited by his Spirit, as it is in his continuing to rule the world. When we ask him to hear the right, we ask him to maintain his own glory, and to support his own throne

Nor is anything that concerns us too minute to claim God's notice. Nearly a century ago a man settled in Western Pennsylvania. He owned a tract

of land with some improvements and stock. But he was far from market, and money was scarce. His family being large, he fell in arrears. He owed his merchant some ten or more dollars. His taxes were also due. He promised the money as soon as he could get it. He offered some of his stock and grain, but no purchaser could be had. At length he was urged to fix a day when the money should be paid with certainty. He went to his home and was much afflicted. Early in the autumn a neighbor and himself built a fish-basket. Each was to have the fruits of it every other morning. The time for paying the money was rapidly approaching. A failure involved the honor of religion. The good man got nothing considerable from his basket, the fish not descending the river. At length he spent most of a day in prayer. Towards evening it grew cool. He continued in prayer. He slept none all night. After midnight he went to the river, and found the fish coming down. He prayed on, and at daylight he had a canoe well filled with fishes. He descended the river rapidly, found ready market for his fishes in Pittsburg, paid all his debts and taxes, procured some needed comforts for his family, and returned home to give thanks to God. That fish-basket stood near the place where the first lock now is on the Youghiogheny River. Many of the

descendants of that man still live. I have the story from their own lips.

God hears and answers the prayers of little children. In 1835, when my health threatened to fail, I travelled through New England and made many pleasant acquaintances. At the house of an eminent Christian, I found a little boy supporting himself by making himself useful in any way he could in the intervals of school. I became interested in him. I got his confidence. He told me his plans and his practice. He was aiming at a professional education. He did not profess to have a new heart; but he prayed often every day, and said he knew God would hear and help him. I encouraged him to persevere in prayer. I suppose he did. For years I lost sight of him, till I learned that my little friend was an ornament to the bar in —— in the northwest.

“What do you do without a mother to tell all your troubles to?” said a child who had a mother to one whose mother was dead.

“Mother told me whom to go to before she died,” answered the little orphan. “I go to the Lord Jesus; he was mother’s friend, and he is mine.”

The other replied: “Jesus Christ is up in the sky; he is away off, and has a great many things to

attend to in heaven. It is not likely he can stop to mind you."

"I do not know about that," said the orphan; "all I know is, *he says he will, and that is enough for me.*"

The orphan was right. God's ear is as open to babes and sucklings as it is to divines and senators.

Oh, that all the children were told as much, and believed it.

In May, 1858, I attended the Fulton street Prayer-meeting in New York. A plain man, who had but recently indulged a hope in Christ, arose and told of the mercy of God in his own salvation. He said he had formerly asked the prayers of the meeting for his pious but insane mother, that she might be restored to reason, so as to be filled with joy and receive his thanks for her fidelity to him in the days of his wickedness. Said he: "That prayer is already so far answered that she has ceased to rave, and is rapidly improving. I shall soon see my mother well." His statement reminds me of a case that occurred in the seventeenth century. "Richard Cook, a pious man, during Mr. Baxter's residence at Kidderminster, went to live in the next house to him. After some time he was seized with melancholy, which ended in madness. The most skillful help was obtained, but all in vain. While he was in this state, some pious persons wished to meet, to fast

and pray in behalf of the sufferer; but Mr. Baxter, in this instance, dissuaded them from it, as he apprehended the case to be hopeless, and thought they would expose prayer to contempt in the eyes of worldly persons, when they saw it unsuccessful. When ten or a dozen years of affliction had passed over Richard Cook, some of the pious men referred to would no longer be dissuaded, but fasted and prayed at his house. They continued this practice once a fortnight for several months; at length the sufferer began to amend, his health and reason returned, and," adds Mr. Baxter, "he is now as well almost as he ever was, and so hath continued for a considerable time." Have you not read in the Gospels? "*This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.*" And, "*This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.*"—Matt. xvii. 21; Mark ix. 29. What mean these Scriptures?

As we need God's Spirit in all things, so he is freely given in answer to prayer, to guide our minds in right channels. Rev. Dr. Wm. Nevins, of Baltimore, prayed for years that he might be able to write one good tract. In his last days he did not doubt that God had answered his prayer, nor can any good man, who has read his tracts and books, doubt that God heard his cry. He asked for little and he got much.

God can answer prayer for anything agreeable to

his will. John Welch, the son-in-law of John Knox, and ancestor of Rev. James Paine, of Somerville, Tenn., and of Rev. H. H. Paine, of Holly Springs, Miss., used to say: "I wonder how a Christian could lie in a bed all night, and not rise to pray." This wonderful man, when banished for the word of God, mastered the French language in fourteen weeks, that he was able to preach in it so acceptably that several churches in France called him. If we did study less like atheists and more like Christians, we should make more progress. Philip Henry made this entry on a day set apart for study: "I forgot when I began, explicitly and expressly to crave help from God, and the chariot wheels drove *accordingly*. Lord, forgive my omission, and keep me in the way of duty." It was once said to a useful minister: "Sir, if you did not *plough* in your closet, you would not *reap* in your pulpit." I know two men in one of the middle States, who say, that if they ever got aid from God in anything in answer to prayer, it was in their studies. Good old Thomas Boston, in his autobiography, tells us the secret of his success in study, when he spread out the Hebrew Bible and prayed to the Lord to have mercy on him, and to give him wakefulness, for he had lately lost much sleep. And long before him David had prayed: "Teach me thy statutes;" "Open thou mine eyes that I may behold

wondrous things out of thy law." The history of Solomon shows that it was chiefly a blessing on his studies that he sought when he prayed for wisdom. Let students pray.

The instances in which, in answer to prayer, God has sent remarkable deliverances to a people, are numerous and striking. In the days of Queen Elizabeth the terrible Spanish Armada was scattered or destroyed in answer to fervent prayers offered by the people of God in England. In 1746, the French armament of forty ships, prepared under the Duke d'Anville against the American colonies, was, in answer to prayer, totally ruined by a tempest. The leaders of the expedition were so overwhelmed at the suddenness and completeness of their disaster, that both of them committed suicide.

But God can save his beleaguered people without destroying their foes. LeClerc tells us that when, in 1672, the Dutch were expecting an attack from their enemies by sea, "public prayers were ordered for deliverance. It came to pass that when their enemies waited only for the tide, in order to land, the tide was retarded, contrary to its usual course, for twelve hours, so that their enemies were obliged to defer the attempt to another opportunity, which they never found, because a storm arose afterwards, and drove them from the coast."

How wonderfully God has answered prayer in behalf of good institutions founded to alleviate human misery. Of this we have a striking instance in the Orphan House, at Halle, founded by Francke. His school was unendowed. In 1696 he had not money to support the school a week longer. When the last morsel was about to be consumed, a thousand crowns were received from an unknown source. At other times of distress he received, in answer to special prayer, twenty, thirty, and fifty crowns. He says: "Another time all our provision was spent, but in addressing myself to the Lord, I found myself deeply affected with the fourth petition of the Lord's prayer, 'Give us this day our daily bread,' and my thoughts were fixed in a more especial manner on the words 'this day,' because on the very same day we had great occasion for it. While I was yet praying, a friend of mine came before my door in a coach, and brought the sum of four hundred crowns!"

And who needs prayer more than a preacher of the gospel? Chalmers was right: "A minister has no ground to hope for fruits from his exertions until in himself he has no hope; but he has learned to put no faith in the point and energy of sentences, until he feels that a man may be mighty to compel attention, and mighty to regale the imagination, and mighty to silence the gainsayer, and yet not mighty

to the pulling down of strongholds." The apostles felt at liberty to devolve the distribution of the church's alms on others chosen for the purpose. But they did not dare to quit praying and preaching. Nay, they did not dare to do anything to diminish their attention to both these duties. They say, "We will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word."—Acts vi. 4. A preacher without prayer is dreadfully weak as well as miserable.

I have known one preacher who would not exhort *sinner*s to pray. His own child sustained an injury, and while the kind surgeon was doing his best to give effectual relief, the little boy was venting his wicked passions in oaths and curses. This made one of the neighbors say, "When children are not encouraged to pray, they may be expected to blaspheme."

It is very true, indeed, that we ought to exhort men to pray sincerely, and not hypocritically—in faith, and not in unbelief. But he who will not pray until, on good grounds, he is sure that he has all right affections and graces, will go to hell before his prayer begins. It is also true that the promises of the covenant of grace are to the believer, and that to any soul of man "unbelief is the annihilation of the promises" of salvation. Yet who can show, by any

truth of natural or revealed religion, that God will never hear the cry of distress of any of his creatures on earth? Are not his tender mercies over all his works here below? Does he not hear the cry of the young raven and the young lion? And is not a man better than many birds and beasts? Does the Lord not invite men everywhere to come to him? Nay, more: in Psalm cvii. he has twice recorded his goodness in answering the prayers of two classes of men notorious for their wickedness. One is a class of men who, for their destructive vices and indulgences, are called *fools*. "Fools, because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted. Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat, and they draw near unto the gates of death. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, *and* he saveth them out of their distresses. He sent his word and healed them, and delivered *them* from their destructions. Oh that *men* would praise the Lord *for* his goodness, and *for* his wonderful works to the children of men!" —Verses 17-21.

The other class is that of sailors, who, in nearly all ages, have been quite irreligious and profane. "They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep. For he commandeth and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth

up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because of the quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven. Oh that *men* would praise the Lord *for* his goodness, and *for* his wonderful works to the children of men!"  
 --Verses 23-31.

Surely if God will hear the cry of such men in their distresses, he may hear the cry of any other poor sinner on earth who needs his friendship. On the first of these passages Scott says: "Loss of strength and of appetite are attended with excessive pain, and death presents itself before their affrighted minds; then the most profane will sometimes cry unto the Lord, and though their prayer is often the mere instinctive voice of distress, yet he frequently hears them, and unexpectedly restores their health and strength."

That God can and will hear the earnest prayer of one in distress, I have been assured by many. I will state one case. More than a quarter of a century ago, I went by invitation to bury an old lady on a

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That God can and will hear the earnest prayer of one in distress, I have been assured by many. I will state one case. More than a quarter of a century ago, I went by invitation to bury an old lady on a

Virginia plantation. Riding in front of the hearse towards the family burying-ground, I came to a place where, in the stubble-field, it was necessary I should have a guide. Accordingly, the son-in-law of the deceased came forward, and rode with me. From him and others then and afterwards I learned that he had been born of respectable parents, had had a good business education, had been made a teller in a bank, had fallen into habits of intemperance, which greatly grieved all around him, that his ruin had proceeded so far, that when awaking on a Monday morning from a revelry of thirty-six hours, he has seen all nature look fair and gay, and it overwhelmed him with sadness; but that when a thunderstorm has arisen, he felt it so in unison with his horrible state of mind, that he said he could have shouted and clapped his hands, had he seen the earth wrapped in a sheet of fire. Nay more; he promised, in the most solemn way, that he would reform, but he broke his word. He even took a solemn oath that he would desist from his vice, but he forswore himself. He was now so far gone, that he had to drink a pint of brandy before he could write up his books in the bank. At length he attempted suicide, but his stomach was so diseased, that it rejected the laudanum. He now felt himself disgraced, resigned his office, went on a vessel to the West Indies,

hoping to be cured of his drunkenness. But after some months, he returned home not a whit improved. All this time he had lived without prayer. At last, walking alone in the field, it occurred to him that there was a kind and strong God, who could hear the cry of distress, and help him. He then began to pray often every day just to be kept from the power of strong drink. He asked for nothing else. For nine months he thus prayed, and during all that time he yielded not once to his appetite. In this state I found him, and told him of the wickedness of his heart, of the need of more than mere sobriety, of the new birth, of the forgiveness of sins, of the blood of Christ and of the Holy Ghost. These truths surprised him. I urged him to pray on, and to include the blessings of the gospel in his prayers. He said he thought he would. I soon visited him, and spent many hours with him. He prayed against drunkenness more than ever, but he prayed for salvation also. In a few weeks, hope in Christ began to cheer him. He regained comfortable health, became a decided Christian, having very much of the temper of John Newton, got a good appointment as a bank officer, was a blessing to his family, for more than twelve years walked in great tenderness and much humility before God, and then died a blessed death. Hundreds of excellent people, among whom are

three eminent ministers of the gospel, of whom one lives in New York, one in Philadelphia, and one in St. Louis, will know that I have sketched the history of John Ennes, of the Brick House, near Petersburg, Va. Years ago I had the permission of his excellent widow, since passed into glory, to make any use of these facts, which I supposed could commend prayer and the grace of God to my fellow-men.

Remarkable outpourings of God's Spirit have always been granted in answer to extraordinary prayer, and in no other way. The great revival in Ezra's time, when he and others preached from morning until midday, to a congregation of *fifty thousand* people before the water-gate of Jerusalem, was preceded by that extraordinary season of devotion mentioned in the 9th chapter of Daniel, where he says, "I set my face unto the LORD my God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes." Before he had ceased, Gabriel flew swiftly and told him that God had granted his request "at the beginning of his supplications." By the same means that great revival was promoted, as we particularly learn from Ezra's own account of it.

The great revival on the day of Pentecost was preceded by a prayer-meeting of the whole church, lasting ten days.—Acts i. 4-14; Acts ii. 1. By the same and similar means that work was continued.—

Acts ii. 41–47. But these things are well known and need not now be dwelt upon.

One of the best preachers that Scotland ever produced was John Livingston, the ancestor of the family of Livingston in the United States. Since the days of the apostles, perhaps no man has ever preached with more power or more success, at least on one occasion. He says, “Earnest faith and prayer, a single aime at the glory of God and good of people, a sanctified heart and carriage, shall avall much for right preaching. There is sometimes somewhat in preaching that cannot be ascribed either to the matter or expression, and cannot be described what it is, or from whence it cometh, but with a sweet violence it pierceth into the heart and affections, and comes immediately from the Lord. But if there be any way to attaine to such a thing, it is by a heavenly disposition of the speaker.” Again he says: “I never preached ane sermon which I would be earnest to see again in wryte but two: the one was on ane Munday after *the communion at Shotts*, and the other on ane Munday after *the communion at Holywood*; and both these times I had spent the whole night before in conference and prayer with some Christians, without any more than ordinary preparation; other-ways, my gift was rather suited to simple common people, than to learned and judicious auditors.”

John Brown, of Haddington, says that five hundred souls were converted under that one sermon at Shotts.

The revival which began at Enfield, Mass., on the 8th of July, 1741, under a sermon preached by the elder President Edwards, on the words, "*Their feet shall slide in due time,*" has long been regarded as one of the most powerful on record. The impression of eternal things was awful and overwhelming. Many, knowing nothing of the history of that work, are surprised at so great effects from one sermon. But the fact is, that some Christians in that vicinity had become alarmed lest God should in anger pass by that church, and had spent the whole of the preceding night in prayer.

The great revival of 1857-8, in the United States, began and has been wonderfully continued in answer to prayer. In September, 1857, one of the western synods invited three others to meet it in a convention for prayer and conference respecting the revival of the work of God. That convention was held, and such a meeting had not been seen in the western country. It was followed by others of a like nature. Daily prayer-meetings in cities, towns and villages were established about the same time all over the land. Thousands and scores of thousands of business men drop all employment at a given hour and go to

the house of prayer. So the work has gone on, and so it will go on, until these meetings are forsaken, or become formal, or vain, or self-righteous, or theatres of display.

That God has many a time put special honor on the prayers of even one of his servants for the reviving of his work, is proven by many incontestable facts. About twenty-five years ago a plain, aged elder, whose name is purposely omitted, lived in a retired congregation. His mind was overwhelmed with a sense of the value of souls, and of the dangers to which sinners were exposed. He prayed much. His church was without a pastor or any preaching for some time. When a servant of Christ visited him, he said, "It makes me glad to see you. I have been praying much for your coming, and for a blessing on your labors. At times it has seemed as if it would kill me, if God's Spirit was not soon poured out upon us." That very week a wonderful revival, which produced lasting good fruits, made its appearance. That minister still lives to tell that story and to preach Christ.

Another case is no less worthy of note. I personally knew the facts. They occurred when I was about twenty years of age. Capt. James McClung married the sister of Dr. Samuel Campbell, who married the eldest sister of Rev. Dr. Archibald

the church. This was not confined to the pastors, but was attended to particularly by the elders. I have in my mind one, who, when brought into the church, could not read the Bible; yet that man did more for the cause of Christ than many ministers. He lay, I think, at the foundation of the great revival which took place forty years ago. He addressed himself to sinners on all occasions. He was a wrestling Jacob, who poured out his soul to God. A hundred times have I knelt with him in a solitary thicket, and implored God to pour out his Spirit upon the whole church. My meaning, then, is, that elders and others should do as this man did, if they would have God to pour out his Spirit. BRETHREN, WAKE UP! Talk to sinners kindly, affectionately, frequently, and God will pour out his Spirit. I have no doubt but God is ready to pour out his Spirit, if we will do our duty." One man may be a blessing to a whole commonwealth. One Philip Jackson in every county would fill the land with joy.

"On their way to Buffalo, to attend a meeting, Mr. Macurdy and Philip Jackson, a ruling elder in the church of Cross Roads, became acquainted. Happening to fall in together, they proceeded in company, conversing familiarly on the subject of religion. They were men of like spirit, and had drunk at the same fountain. Their intercourse soon became

free and unrestrained. Philip had a son who was wild and irreligious, for whose salvation he was deeply concerned. He made known the particulars of his case to Mr. Macurdy, and desired him to turn aside with him into the woods, that they might unite in prayer for his conversion. His request was complied with, and in a grove near the road, with the aged elder kneeling at his side, Mr. Macurdy poured out his soul to God on behalf of this ungodly youth. Not long after this, young Jackson became seriously impressed, and hopefully converted. Philip ever afterwards connected this happy result with Mr. Macurdy's prayer in the woods, and on this account was very strongly attached to him." The time referred to was that of the great revivals about the beginning of this century.

A living useful pastor relates the following: "A Christian mother in my congregation, whose husband was a dissipated man, had a son in a military academy at the East. He was wayward, and seemed bent upon quitting it to seek his fortune at sea. The mother prayed earnestly for the boy, that he might be controlled by God for his salvation. One night she wrestled till day dawn for her son, not having heard recently from him, and fearing the worst. As it afterwards proved, he had the day previous quit the school, and engaged himself with

a shipmaster in New York for a voyage, to set sail the next day. But that night he could not sleep. He was disturbed, and knew not why. He felt an indescribable drawing towards his home. He could not get over it. He must get home. He could not help it, and so he went early the next morning to the shipmaster, and broke off his engagement, and started home. He arrived there greatly to his poor mother's surprise, and he found the whole community engaged in the daily prayer-meetings. But he hated the very mention of them. A few days passed by, he meanwhile absenting himself from these services. At length he came knocking at the door of the pastor, asking, with tears, what must I do to be saved? The pastor directed him to Christ. That night he arose at midnight sleepless, and knocked at his father's chamber door, begging him to pray for him. The father grew angry at his importunity, began to threaten him, if he did not cease, and told his mother if she did not take him away or silence him, he would lay violent hands upon him. But he could not desist from his earnest inquiries for salvation until he found Christ. And as the facts all came to light, it proved that the very night that mother was wrestling till day-dawn in her closet, 500 miles away from her son, that son was kept sleepless and troubled on his bed, so that he must

break his rash engagement to go to sea, and must seek the face of his injured mother, and then the face of his injured God."

A prominent pastor recently related, at a prayer-meeting of the Synod of Pittsburg, the following:

"At the time of my ordination and installation, and just after the exercises were concluded, one of the elders of the church over which I was installed pastor, came up to me, took me earnestly by the hand, and said: 'Do you remember a few years ago, you were stopping for the night in the town of —, and lodged at the hotel? You came into the room and retired, when an old man, lying in an adjacent bed, remarked to you, that he observed you got into bed without offering prayer, and added a few words of address to you on the subject. I am that old man. I turned my face around from you and prayed earnestly to God that he might convert you to himself, and make you a minister of Christ. *And here,*' said he, '*God has heard my prayer, and I take you by the hand to-day as my pastor.'*"

IT IS GOD'S MEMORIAL THAT IN EVERY GENERATION  
HE HEARETH PRAYER.

THE END.