

SERMON XIV.

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HOW TO MANAGE SECRET PRAYER, THAT IT MAY BE PREVALENT
WITH GOD TO THE COMFORT AND SATISFACTION OF THE SOUL.

But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.—Matt. vi. 6.

WE have here our blessed Lord's instruction for the management of secret prayer, the crown and glory of a child of God: wherein observe,

1. *The direction prescribed for our deportment in secret duty, in three things:—*

(1.) *Enter into thy closet*—The word *ταμειον* Hesychius glosses by *αποκρυφον οικημα*, “a secret or recluse habitation;” and Suidas, by *θησαυρος*, “a hiding-place for treasures,” by a metonymy. The LXX. (such as we have it) turn the Hebrew word *קִרְיָה* so frequently by *ταμειον*, that we need inquire no further; as Gen. xliii. 30; Exod. viii. 3; 2 Sam. xiii. 10; 1 Kings i. 15; and elsewhere, for “a chamber, a parlour, a bed-chamber.” Sometimes, the word *קִרְיָה*, *foramen, caverna*, “a hole, cleft, or cavern in a rock,” as Isai. xlii. 22, which they render also by *τραγλη* and *ση*, *rima*. The etymon of the word, being derived *απο του τεμνειν*, from holes, pits, caves “cut out” in rocks, shows that it notes secret places for retirements or repositories. It is accordingly rendered by “secret chambers,” Matt. xxiv. 26; and by “closets,” Luke xii. 3.

(2.) *Shut the door*—Or, “lock it,” as the word insinuates, *Κλεισας την θυραν*, (from whence *κλεις*, “a key,” is deduced; and [they] are both put together, as appears by Rev. iii. 7; xx. 1, 3,) implying that we must “bar or bolt” it.

(3.) *Pray to thy Father in secret*—“Father,” which is *pietatis et potestatis appellatio*, as Tertullian notes,* “a name hinting both piety and power.” *To thy Father*—Noting both propriety and intimacy.

2. *A gracious promise.*—Which may be branched into three parts:—

(1.) *For thy Father sees thee in secret*—His eye is upon thee with a gracious aspect, when thou art withdrawn from all the world.

(2.) *He will reward thee*—*Αποδωσει*, *retribuet, reponet*, or, as Ambrose† reads it, *reddet*: so the word is sometimes translated by “rendering,” (Matt. xxii. 21; Rom. ii. 6; xiii. 7,) by “delivering,” (Matt. xxvii. 58; Luke ix. 42,) by “yielding” or “affording.” (Heb. xii. 11; Rev. xxii. 2.) All which comes to this: “He will return thy prayers or thy requests amply and abundantly into thy bosom.”

(3.) *He will do it openly*—*Εν τῷ φανερῷ*, “perspicuously and manifestly” before the world sometimes, and most plentifully and

* *De Oratione.*

† *De Abel et Cain,*

exuberantly before men and angels at the great day. Secret prayers shall have open and public answers.

3. *Here is a demonstration of sincerity*, from the right performance of this duty, set forth by the antithesis: "But thou shalt not be as the hypocrites." (Matt. vi. 5.)

When—That is, as often as *Thou prayest*—By thyself. *Enter*—Not thy house only, thy hall, or thy common chamber, but *Thy closet*—The most secret and retired privacy. *Shut the door*—That others may neither discern thee, nor rush in suddenly upon thee. *He shall reward thee*—That is, he shall answer thee and perform thy request; as a gracious return to thy secret sincerity. God is pleased by promise to make himself a debtor to secret prayer. It brings nothing to God but empty hands and naked hearts; to show that reward, in scripture-sense, does not flow-in upon the streams of merit, but grace. It is monkish divinity to assert otherwise; for, what merit, strictly taken, can there be in prayer? The mere asking of mercy cannot merit it at the hands of God, who out of our most sincere petitions (being at best impregnated with sinful mixtures) might take-up matter enough to fling as the dung of our sacrifices in our faces. (Mal. ii. 3.) We halt like Jacob both in and after our choicest and strongest wrestlings; but such is the grace of our heavenly Father, who spies that little sincerity of our hearts in secret, that he is pleased to accept us in his Beloved, and to smell a savour of rest in the fragrant perfumes and odours of his intercession.

Hence, though I might draw forth several notes, yet [I] shall treat but of one, containing the marrow and nerves of the text:—

OBSERVATION. *That secret prayer, duly managed, is the mark of a sincere heart, and hath the promise of a gracious return.*—Prayer is the soul's colloquy with God; and secret prayer is a conference with God, upon admission into the privy-chamber of heaven. When thou hast shut thine own closet, when God and thy soul are alone, with this key thou openest the chambers of Paradise, and enterest the closet of divine love. When thou art immured as in a curious labyrinth from the tumultuous world, and entered into that garden of Lebanon in the midst of thy closet, thy soul, like a spiritual Dædalus, takes to itself the wings of faith and prayer, and flies into the midst of heaven among the cherubims. I may term secret prayer "the invisible flight of the soul into the bosom of God:" out of this heavenly closet rises Jacob's ladder, whose rounds are all of light; its foot stands upon the basis of the covenant in thy heart, its top reaches the throne of grace. When thy reins have instructed thee in the night-season with holy petitions, when thy soul hath desired him in the night, then with thy spirit within thee wilt thou seek him early. (Psalm xvi. 7; Isai. xxvi. 9.) When the door of thy heart is shut, and the windows of thine eyes sealed-up from all vain and worldly objects, up thou mountest, and hast a place given thee to walk among angels "that stand by" the throne of God. (Zech. iii. 7.) In secret prayer the soul, like Moses, is in the backside of the desert, and talks with the angel of the covenant in the fiery bush. (Exod. iii. 1—6.) Here is Isaac in the field at even-tide, meditating and praying to the God of his father Abraham. (Gen. xxiv. 63.) Here is Elijah under the juniper-tree at Rithmah in the wilderness, and anon in the cave

hearkening to the still small voice of God. (1 Kings xix. 4, 12.) Here is Christ and the spouse alone in the wine-cellar, and the banner of love over her; (Canticles ii. 4;) where she utters *verba dimidiata, ubi bibit ebriam sobrietatem Spiritus*, "but half words, having drunk of the sober excess of the Spirit." * (Eph. v. 18.) Here we find Nathanael under the fig-tree, though it may be at secret prayer, yet under a beam of the eye of Christ. (John i. 48.) There sits Austin in the garden alone, sighing with the Psalmist, *Usque quò, Domine?* "How long, O Lord?" and listening to the voice of God, *Tolle, lege*, "Take up the Bible and read." †

It is true, hypocrites may pray, and pray alone, and pray long, and receive their reward, *παρ' ὧν ἐπιθυμοῦσιν αὐτοί*, "from such whose observation they desire;" but they take no true delight in secret devotion, they have no spring of affection to God. (Matt. xxiii. 14.) ‡ But, "O my dove," says Christ, "that art in the clefts of the rock, let me hear thy voice; for the melody thereof is sweet." (Canticles ii. 14.) A weeping countenance and a wounded spirit are most beautiful prospects to the eye of heaven. When a broken heart pours-out repentant tears, like streams from the rock smitten by the rod of Moses's law in the hand of a Mediator; O, how amiable in the sight of God! "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee." (Psalm cxxx. 1.) As Chrysostom glosses, *Καταθεν ἀπο τῆς καρδίας σου ἔλκυσσον τὴν φωνήν μυστηρίον ποιήσον σου τὴν εὐχὴν*. "Draw sighs from the furrows of thy heart, *e sulco pectoris*: let thy prayer become a hidden mystery of divine secrets;" like good Hezekiah upon the bed with his face to the wall, that none might observe him; (Isai. xxxviii. 2, 5;) or like our blessed Lord, that grand Example, who retired into solitudes and mountains apart, and saw by night the illustrious face of his heavenly Father in prayer. The reasons follow:—

1. *Because a sincere heart busies itself about heart-work.*—To mortify sin, to quicken grace, to observe and resist temptations, to secure and advance his evidences; and therefore is so much conversant in secret prayer. The glory of the king's daughter shines within, arrayed with clothes of gold; (Psalm xlv. 13;) but they are the spangled and glittering hangings of the closet of her heart, when she entertains communion with her Lord. The more a saint converses with his own heart, the more he searches his spiritual wants, and feels his spiritual joys.

2. *Because a sincere heart aims at the eye of God.*—He knows that God, being a Spirit, loves to converse with our spirits, and "to speak to the heart" more than the outward ear. (Hosea ii. 14.) He labours to walk before God, as being always in his sight, but especially when he presents himself at the footstool of mercy. Because God is invisible, *τὴν εὐχὴν σου τοιαυτὴν εἶναι βούλεται*. § An invisible God is delighted with invisible prayers, when no eye sees but his; he takes most pleasure in the secret glances of a holy heart. Therefore a gracious soul prays in secret with the same diligence and care, nay, sometimes more, when in a holy frame, that he may reap the comfort of his sincerity before the eyes of God. (Job xxxi. 33.)

* GERSON. † *Confess.* lib. viii. cap. 12. ‡ CHRYSOSTOMUS *in loc.* § *Idem.* Because God is himself invisible, "it is his will that thy prayers also should possess the same character of invisibility."—*EDIT.*

But no more of this : let us descend to the question deducible from the words, a question of no less importance than daily use, and of peculiar concernment to the growth of every Christian :—

QUESTION. *How to manage secret prayer, that it may be prevalent with God to the comfort and satisfaction of the soul.*

For method's sake, I shall divide it into two branches :—

1. *How to manage secret prayer, that it may prevail with God.*

2. *How to discern and discover answers to secret prayer, that the soul may acquiesce and be satisfied that it hath prevailed with God.*

Before I handle these, I would briefly prove *the duty and its usefulness*, leaving some cases about its attendants and circumstances towards the close.

1. *As to the duty itself*, the text is plain and distinct in the point. Yet further observe in Solomon's prayer, that if any man besides the community of the people of Israel shall present his supplication to God, he there prays for a gracious and particular answer ; (1 Kings viii. 38, 39 ; 2 Chron. vi. 29, 30 ;) and we know Solomon's prayer was answered by fire ; (2 Chron. vii. 1 ;) and, therefore, hence we may learn a promise given-forth to personal prayer. Besides the many special and particular injunctions unto individual persons in the case, as Job xxii. 27 ; xxxiii. 26 ; Psalm xxxii. 6 ; and 1. 15, &c. ; wives, as well as husbands, are to pray "apart," (Zech. xii. 14,) לְבָדָּהּ "solitary, alone by themselves ;" and James v. 13.

We may argue this point from the constant practice of the holy saints of God in all ages, but especially of our blessed Lord ; and it is our wisdom to "walk in the way of good men, and keep the paths of the righteous." (Prov. ii. 20.) What should I speak of Abraham, Eliezer, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Hannah, Hezekiah, David, and Daniel ? The time would fail me to bring-in the cloud of witnesses. Our Lord we find sometimes in a desert, in a mountain, in a garden, at prayer ; Cornelius in his house, and Peter upon the house-top, in secret supplications to God. The experience of God's gracious presence and answers sent-in upon secret prayer, as in the stories of Eliezer, Jabez, Nehemiah, Zechariah, Cornelius, and Paul, &c. (1 Chron. iv. 10 ; Nehem. ii. 4.) "For this" cause, because David was heard, "shall every one that is godly pray unto him." (Psalm xxxii. 6.)

2. I might urge the *usefulness*, nay, in some cases the necessities, of secret applications to God :—

(1.) Are we not guilty of secret sins in the light of God's countenance, that cannot, ought not to be, confessed with or before others ? Insomuch that near relations are exhorted to secret and solitary duties. (Zech. xii. 12 ; 1 Cor. vii. 5.)

(2.) Are there not personal wants that we would prefer to God alone ?

(3.) Are there not some special mercies and deliverances that concern our own persons more peculiarly, which should engage [us] "to commune with our own hearts," and "offer the sacrifices of righteousness" to God ? (Psalm iv. 4, 5.)

(4.) May there not be found some requests to be poured out more particularly in secret, as to other persons, and as to affairs of the church of God, which may not commodiously be insisted upon in common ?

(5.) Do not sometimes emergent and urgent passions spring out of the soul in secret, that are not comely in society?

(6.) To argue from the text : may not the soul's secret addresses about inward sorrows and joys be a sweet testimony of the sincerity and integrity of the heart, when "the heart knoweth his own bitterness, and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy?" (Prov. xiv. 10.) Perhaps a man has an Ishmael, an Absalom, a Rehoboam to weep for, and therefore gets into an inward chamber : (2 Sam. xviii. 33 :) where, behold, his "witness is in heaven," and his "record on high," and when others may "scorn" or pity, his "eye poureth out tears unto God." (Job xvi. 19, 20.)

To end this : when a holy soul is close in secret, what complacency does it take, when it has bolted out the world, and retired to a place that none knows of, to be free from the disturbances and distractions that often violate family communion ! When it is in the secret of the face of God, in the hidden place of the Most High, and in the shadow of the Almighty, O how safe, how comfortable ! (Psalm xxxi. 20 ; xci. 1 ; Job xxix. 4.)

These and the like I pass by ; neither can I insist upon secret prayer under the variety of mental and vocal ; nor enlarge upon it as sudden, occasional, or ejaculatory, referring somewhat of this toward the end.

Let us address, then, to the first question : in answer whereto I must preface, that some things which aptly belong to secret prayer, yet being in some measure coincident with all prayer, public, private, and secret, it is congruous to treat of such as are of great use as to the management of our present duty ; and therefore must refer to a double head.

QUESTION I. *How to manage secret prayer, as it is coincident with prayer in general, so that it may prevail ?*

1. *Use some preparation before it ; rush not suddenly into the awful presence of God.*—Sanctuary-preparation is necessary to sanctuary-communion. Such suitable preparatory frames of the heart come down from God : "Thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear." (Psalm x. 17.) It was a good saying of one, *Intimè et devotè nunquam mens orat, quæ se, &c., præmeditationibus prius non excitat.** "He never prays ardently that does not premeditate savourly." Daniel, when he made that famous prayer, it is said he "set" his "face to seek" the Lord. (Dan. ix. 3.) Jehoshaphat also "set himself to seek the Lord." (2 Chron. xx. 3.) The church in her soul desires the Lord in the night, and then with her spirit seeks him early. (Isai. xxvi. 9.) Desires blown by meditation are the sparks that set prayer in a light flame.

The work of preparation may be cast under five heads, when we apply to solemn and set prayer :—

(1.) The consideration of some attributes in God that are proper to the intended petitions.

(2.) A digestion of some peculiar and special promises that concern the affair.

(3.) Meditation on suitable arguments.

(4.) Ejaculations for assistance.

(5.) An engagement of the heart to a holy frame of reverence and

* RICHARDUS DE SANCTO VICTORE, *De Eruditione Homini interioris*, lib. i. cap. 7.

keeping to the point in hand.—*Nec quicquam tunc animus quam solum cogitet, quod precatur*, was serious advice from Cyprian : “ Let the soul think upon nothing but what it is to pray for ;” and [he] adds that therefore the ministers of old prepared the minds of the people with, *Sursum corda*, “ Let your hearts be above.” * For how can we expect to be heard of God, when we do not hear ourselves, when the heart does not watch while the tongue utters ? The tongue must be like “ the pen of a ready writer,” to set down the good matter which the heart indites. (Psalm xlv. 1.) Take heed of ramblings ; to preach, or tell pious stories, while praying to the great and holy God, is a branch of irreverence, and a careless frame of spirit. (Heb. xii. 28.)

2. *Humble confession of such sins as concern and refer principally to the work in hand.*—Our filthy garments must be taken away, when we appear before the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem. (Zech. iii. 4.) “ Look upon mine affliction and my pain,” cries David ; “ and forgive all my sins.” (Psalm xxv. 18.) There are certain sins that often relate to afflictions. First, “ Deliver me from all my transgressions ;” then, “ Hear my prayer, O Lord ;” (Psalm xxxix. 8, 12 ;) for this is the heavenly method : he first “ forgiveth all ” our “ iniquities,” and then “ healeth all ” our “ diseases.” (Psalm ciii. 3.) A forgiven soul is a healed soul : while a man is sick at heart with the qualms of sin unpardoned, it keeps the soul under deliquiums and swooning-fits, that it cannot cry strongly unto God ; and therefore in holy groans [he] must discharge himself of particular sins, and pour out his soul before God. Thus did David in that great penitential psalm, Psalm li. 4. For sin like a thick cloud hides the face of God, that our prayers cannot enter. (Isai. lix. 2.) We must blush with Ezra, (ix. 6,) and our faces look red with the flushings of conscience, if we expect any smiles of mercy. Our crimson sins must dye our confessions ; and the blood of our sacrifices must sprinkle the horns of the golden altar, before we receive an answer of peace from the golden mercy-seat. When our persons are pardoned, our suits are accepted, and our petitions crowned with the olive-branch of peace.

3. *An arguing and pleading spirit in prayer.*—This is properly wrestling with God, humble, yet earnest, expostulations about his mind towards us : “ Why hast thou cast us off for ever ? why doth thine anger smoke ?” (Psalm lxiv. 1.) “ Be not wroth very sore, O Lord, neither remember iniquity for ever : behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people.” (Isai. lxiv. 9.) “ If it be so, why am I thus ?” as frightened Rebekah flies out into prayer. (Gen. xxv. 22.) An arguing frame in prayer cures and appeases the frights of spirit, and then inquires of God. (Psalm xxxiv. 4.) The temple of prayer is called the soul’s inquiring-place. (Psalm xxvii. 4.) “ Why is God so far from the words of my roaring ? Thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns.” (Psalm xxii. 1, 21.) “ How long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people ? Turn us again, and cause thy face to shine upon us.” (Psalm lxxx. 3, 4.) “ O the hope of Israel, why shouldest thou be as a wayfaring man, as a man astonished ? Yet thou, O Lord, art in the midst of us, and we are called by thy name ; leave

* CYPRIANUS *De Oratione*, p. 106, sixth edition.

us not." (Jer. xiv. 8, 9.) I must refer to Abraham, Jacob, and Moses, Joshua, David, and Daniel, how they urged arguments with God: sometimes from the multitudes of God's mercies, (Psalm v. 7; vi. 4; xxxi. 16,) from the experience of former answers, from the name of God, (Psalm iv. 1; vi. 9; xxii. 4, 21; xxxi. 2, 3, 7; cxl. 7,) from their trust and reliance upon him, (Psalm ix. 10; xvi. 1,) from the equity of God, (Psalm xvii. 1,) from the shame and confusion of face that God will put his people to, if not answered, and that others will be driven away from God, (Psalm xxxi. 17; xxxiv. 5,) and, lastly, from the promise of praise. (Psalm xx. 5; xxxv. 18.) These and many like pleadings we find in scripture, for patterns in prayer; which, being suggested by the Spirit, kindled from the altar, and perfumed with Christ's incense, rise-up like memorial-pillars before the oracle. Let us observe one or two particular prayers, what instant arguments holy men have used and pressed in their perplexities. Jehoshaphat—what a working prayer did he make! taking pleas from God's covenant, dominion, and powerful strength; from his gift of the land of Canaan, and driving out the old inhabitants,—ancient mercies! from his sanctuary, and his promise to Solomon; from the ingratitude and ill requital of the enemies; with an appeal to God's equity in the case, and a humble confession of their own impotency, and yet that, in their anxiety, their eyes are fixed upon God. (2 Chron. xx. 6—12.) You know how gloriously it prevailed, when he had set ambushments round about the court of heaven, and the Lord turned his arguments into ambushments against the children of Edom, &c. (Verse 22.) Yea, this is set as an instance how God will deal against the enemies of his church in the latter days. (Joel iii. 2.) Another is that admirable prayer of the Angel of the covenant to God for the restoration of Jerusalem, wherein he pleads from the length of time and the duration of his indignation for threescore and ten years, from promised mercies and the expiration of prophecies: (Zech. i. 12:) and behold an answer of good and comfortable words from the Lord; and pray observe, that when arguments in prayer are very cogent upon a sanctified heart,—such being drawn from the divine attributes, from precious promises, and sweet experiments of God's former love,—it is a rare sign of a prevailing prayer. It was an ingenious passage of Chrysostom concerning the woman of Canaan, *Φιλοσοφῆς ἡ γυνή** the poor distressed creature "was turned an acute philosopher" with Christ, and disputed the mercy from him. O, it is a blessed thing to attain to this heavenly philosophy of prayer, to argue blessings out of the hand of God. Here is a spacious field. I have given but a small prospect, where the soul, like Jacob, does in *arenam descendere*, "enter the lists" with Omnipotency, and by holy force obtain the blessing.

4. *Ardent affections in prayer, betokening a heart deeply sensible, are greatly prevalent.*—A crying prayer pierces the depths of heaven. We read not a word that Moses spake, but God was moved by his cry. (Exod. xiv. 15.) I mean not an obstreperous noise, but melting moans of heart. Yet sometimes the sore and pinching necessities and distresses of spirit extort even vocal cries not displeasing to the inclined

* CHRYSOSTOMUS in *Matt. xx.*

ears of God. "I cried unto the Lord with my voice," says David, "and he heard me out of his holy hill." (Psalm iii. 4.) And this encourages to a fresh onset: "Hearken unto the voice of my cry, my King, and my God." (Psalm v. 2.) "Give ear unto my cry; hold not thy peace at my tears." (Psalm xxxix. 12.) Another time he makes the cave echo with his cries: "I cried, I cried. Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low." And what is the issue? Faith gets courage by crying: his tears watered his faith that it grew unto confidence, and so concludes, "Thou shalt deal bountifully with me, and the righteous shall crown me for conqueror." * (Psalm cxlii. 1, 5—7.) Plentiful tears bring bountiful mercies, and a crying suitor proves a triumphant praiser. Holy Jacob was just such another: at the fords of Jabbok he prevailed with the Angel; for "he wept, and made supplication unto him." (Hosea xii. 4.) Hezekiah may bring up the rear: for the Lord told him he had heard his prayer, for he had seen his tears. (2 Kings xx. 5.) Such precedents may well encourage backsliding Ephraim to return and bemoan himself; and then the "bowels" of God "are troubled for him." (Jer. xxxi. 18—20.) Nay, we have a holy woman likewise weeping sore before the Lord in Shiloh, and then rejoicing in his salvation. (1 Sam. i. 10; ii. 1.) The cries of saints are like *vocal* music joined with the *instrumental* of prayer; they make heavenly melody in the ears of God. The bridegroom calls to his mourning dove, "'Let me hear thy voice;' for that is pleasant." (Canticles ii. 14.) What Gerson says of the sores of Lazarus, *Quot vulnera, tot linguas habuit*,† "As many wounds, so many tongues," we may say of sighs, cries, and groans in prayer, "So many eloquent orators at the throne of God."

5. *Importunity and assiduity in prayer is highly prevalent.*—*Non ut fastidiosa continuetur oratio, sed ut assidua frequenter effundatur*: ‡ "Not that we should lengthen out prayer with tedious and vain repetitions," as the Heathen did of old, (Matt. vi. 7,) or as the Euchitæ in Constantius's time, that did little else but pray; § "but that we should be frequent, and continue instant, in prayer." Whereas our Lord bids us to "pray always," (Luke xviii. 1,) and the apostle Paul to "pray without ceasing," (1 Thess. v. 17,) we are to understand it of constancy at times every day. As the morning and evening sacrifice at the temple is called the "continual burnt-offering;" (Num. xxviii. 4, 6;) as Mephibosheth is said to "eat bread continually" at David's table, (2 Sam. ix. 7,) and Solomon's servants to stand continually before him, that is, at the set and appointed times; so it is required of us to be constant and assiduous at prayer, and to follow our lawful requests with perseverance. Thus Hannah is said to "multiply prayer," (1 Sam. i. 12,) and received multiplied answers; expressly indeed she prayed but for one son, but she had six children returned-in upon prayer.

When the soul perseveres in prayer, it is a sign of a persevering faith; and such may have what they will at the hand of God, when praying according to prescript. (John xvi. 23.) Nay, urgent prayer is the token of a mercy at hand: when Elijah prayed seven times one

* יכתרו *Coronabunt.*
De Cain et Abel, lib. i. cap. 9.

† GERSON, tom. II. fol. 77, a.
§ EPIPHANIUS, *Hæres.* 30.

‡ AMBROSIIUS

after another for rain, the clouds presently march up out of the sea at the command of prayer. (1 Kings xviii. 43, 44.) "Ask of me things to come," saith the Lord, "and concerning the work of my hands command ye me." (Isai. xlv. 11.) When we put forth our utmost strength in prayer, and will, as it were, receive no "nay" from heaven, our prayers must be like the continual blowing of the silver trumpets over the sacrifices "for a memorial before the Lord;" (Num. x. 10;) like the watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem, who "never hold their peace day nor night," [and] are commanded "not to keep silence, nor to give him rest." (Isai. lxii. 6, 7.) Nay, God seems offended at another time, that they did not lay hands upon him, that they might not be consumed in their iniquities. (Isai. lxiv. 7.) Such prayers are, as it were, a holy molestation to the throne of grace.

It is said of the man that rose at midnight to give out three loaves to his friend, he did it not for friendship's sake, but *δια την αναίδειαν*, "because he was impudent," so importunately to trouble him at such a season as twelve o'clock at night. (Luke xi. 8.) Our Lord applies the parable to instant prayers. The like we find of the success of the widow with the unjust judge, because she did *παρεχειν κοπον*, "vex and molest" him with her solicitations. (Luke xviii. 5.) But of all, the pattern of the woman of Canaan is most admirable, when the disciples desired her to be dismissed, because she troubled them by crying after them, and yet she persists. (Matt. xv. 23.) May I say it reverently? Christ delights in such a troublesome person. Though, as an ancient observes, by comparing both evangelists, that first she cried after Christ in the streets, (Matt. xv. 22,) but our Lord taking house, she follows him thither, and falls down at his feet; (Mark vii. 24, 25;) but as yet he "answered her not a word:" (Matt. xv. 23:) *In eo silentio egressum fuisse Jesum de domo illâ*:* then our Lord going out of the house again, she follows with stronger importunity, and argues the mercy into her bosom, and Christ ascribes it to the greatness of her faith; *καλη αναίσχυντια*, as another terms it, "a laudable and praiseworthy immodesty;" as, in the former case, to knock so rudely at midnight is deemed no incivility at the gate of heaven. This is *δεησις ενεργουµενή* as Guil. Parisiensis reads it, *deprecatio justi assidua*.† (James v. 16.) "An assiduous prayer" is the way to become "an efficacious prayer." It is ill taken, if not importunate: cold petitioners must have cool answers. If the matter of prayer be right, and the promise of God fervently urged, thou art likely to prevail like princely Israel, that held the Angel by the collar, (to speak with reverence,) and would not let him go until he had blessed him. But it was hot work most of the night, even to break of day; (Gen. xxxii. 24—26;) to show that in some cases of extremity we must hold-out in prayers. For our Lord in the next verse to the text does not forbid the length of prayer, for he himself upon occasion continues a whole night in prayer; (Luke vi. 12;) but [he forbids] such as are filled with impertinent multiplications of vain words, and have neither holy reasonings nor spiritual and warm affections, and yet think to be "heard for their much speaking."

* AUGUSTINUS *De Consensu Evangelistarum*, tom. iv. lib. ii. p. 447. Edit. Basil. 1569.

† *De Rhetoricâ Divinâ*, p. 353.

QUESTION. "But can God be moved by our arguments, or affected with our troubles? He is the unchangeable God, and dwells in the inaccessible light. There 'is no variableness, neither shadow of turning;' (James i. 17;) a metaphor from the fixed stars, which admit no parallax; and therefore astronomers cannot demonstrate their magnitude: for our eyes or instruments can yet give no intelligence of any increase or diminution of their diameter or light." *

ANSWER. Those holy motions upon the hearts of saints in prayer are the fruits of the unchangeable decrees of his love to them, and the appointed ushers of mercy. God graciously determines to give a praying, arguing, warm, affectionate frame, as the *prodromus* and "fore-runner" of a decreed mercy. That is the reason that carnal men can enjoy no such mercies, because they pour out no such prayers. The spirit of prayer prognosticates mercy ensuing. Wherefore, when the Lord by Jeremy foretold the end of the captivity, he also pre-signifies the prayers that should open the gates of Babylon. (Jer. xix. 10, 12.) Cyrus was prophesied of, to do his work for Jacob his servant's sake and Israel his elect; but yet they must ask him concerning those things to come, and they should not seek him in vain. (Isai. xlv. 1, 2, 4, 11, 19.) The glory of the latter days in the return of Israel is foretold by Ezekiel; but yet then the Lord "will be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them." (Ezek. xxxvi. 24, 37.) The coming of Christ is promised by himself; but yet "the Spirit and the bride say, Come;" and he "that heareth" must "say, Come." And when Christ says he will "come quickly:" "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." (Rev. xxii. 12, 17, 20.) Divine grace kindles these ardent affections, when the mercies promised are upon the wing.† Prayer is that intelligible chain, as Dionysius calls it, that draws the souls up to God, and the mercy down to us; or like the cable that draws the ship to land, though the shore itself remain unmovable. Prayer has its kindlings from heaven, like the ancient sacrifices that were inflamed with celestial fire. (2 Chron. vii. 1.)

6. *Submission to the all-wise and holy will of God.*—This is the great benefit of a saint's communion with the Spirit, that "He maketh intercession for" them "according to the will of God." (Rom. viii. 27.) When promised mercies are revealed in more absolute terms, the sanctified will concentrates with the will of God. When we pray for holiness, there is a concurrence with the divine will: "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification." (1 Thess. iv. 3.) When we pray that our bodies may be presented "a living sacrifice, acceptable unto God," we then "prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." (Rom. xii. 1, 2.) But I speak here as to outward mercies and enjoyments, and the gradualities or degrees of graces and spiritual mercies. But as to substance of spiritual mercies, the promises in such cases run freely; as, if in any place there seem to lie any limitations or conditions, those very conditions are otherwise graciously promised to be wrought in us. In the covenant of grace, God does his part and ours too. As, when God commands us to pray in one place, he promises in another place to pour-out upon us "the spirit of grace and of supplica-

* KEPLER *Astronomia*, lib. iv. p. 495. Fran. 1635, &c. ARGOLI's *Tables*, p. 72.
† GERSON, tom. ii. KK. 3, 6.

tions." (Zech. xii. 10.) God commands us to "repent and turn" unto him. (Ezek. xiv. 6.) In another place, "Turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God; (Jer. xxxi. 18;) and again, "Turn thou us unto thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned." (Lam. v. 21.) "Make you a new heart and a new spirit:" elsewhere, "A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you," &c., "and cause you to walk in my statutes." (Ezek. xviii. 31; xxxvi. 26, 27.) "That ye might walk unto all pleasing," says Paul, "for this cause we do not cease to pray for you," &c.; (Col. i. 9, 10;) that he would "work in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight." (Heb. xiii. 21.) "Work out your own salvation. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." (Phil. ii. 12, 13.) Precepts, promises, and prayer, are connected, like so many golden links, to excite, encourage, and assist the soul in spiritual duties. But in other cases, as to temporal and temporary mercies, let all thy desires in prayer be formed with submission, guided by his counsel, and prostrate at his feet, and acted by a faith suitable to the promises of outward blessings; and then it shall "be unto thee even as thou wilt." (Matt. xv. 28.) He said well, *Cardo desideriorum sit voluntas Dei*; [*ut*] *exaudiat, pete cardinem*: "Let all thy desires as to temporals turn upon the hinge of the divine good pleasure. That man shall have his own will that resolves to make God's will his." * God will certainly bestow that which is for the good of his people. (Psalm xxxiv. 17; lxxxiv. 11; Matt. vii. 11; Rom. viii. 28.) One great point of our mortification lies in this, to have our wills melted into God's; and it is a great token of spiritual growth, when [we are] not only content, but joyful, to see *our* wills crossed, that *his* may be done. We pray that his "kingdom" may "come;" let it appear by sincere prayer that his "will" may "be done." When our wills are sacrificed in the flames of holy prayer, we many times receive choicer things than we ask expressly. It was a good saying, *Non dat quod volumus, ut det quod malimus*: "God many times grants not what we will in the present prayers, that he may bestow what we had rather have," when we have the prayer more graciously answered than we petitioned: we know not how to pray as we ought; but the Spirit helps us out with groans that secretly hint a correction of our wills and spirit in prayer. (Rom. viii. 26.) In great anxieties and pinching troubles, nature dictates strong groans for relief; but sustaining grace, and participation of divine holiness, mortification from earthly comforts, (Heb. xii. 10,) excitation of the soul to long for heaven, being gradually weaned from the wormwood-breasts of these sublunary, transient, and unsatisfying pleasures, and the timing of our hearts for the seasons, wherein God will time his deliverances, are sweeter mercies than the present return of a prayer for an outward good into our bosoms. What truly holy person would lose that "light of" God's "countenance," which he enjoyed by glimpses in a cloudy day, for a little "corn and wine?" "Thou hast put more gladness into my heart," says David. (Psalm iv. 6, 7.) Nay, in many cases open denials of prayer prove the most excellent answers, and God's not hearing us is the most signal audience. Therefore at the foot of every prayer subscribe, *Fiat voluntas tua*, ["Thy will be done,"] and

* GERSON, tom. ii.

thou shalt enjoy preventing mercies that thou never soughtest, and converting mercies to change all for the best ; resting confident in this, that having asked "according to his will, he heareth" thee. (1 John v. 14.)

7. Lastly. *Present all into the hands of Christ.*—This was signified of old by praying toward the temple, (1 Kings viii. 33,) because the golden mercy-seat, typifying Christ, was there: he is "ordained" of God "to offer gifts and sacrifices;" and therefore it is of necessity that he should have something from us to offer, being the "high priest over the house of God." (Heb. viii. 3; x. 21.) What does Christ on our behalf at the throne of grace? Put some petition into the hands of Christ; he waits for our offerings at the door of the oracle; leave the sighs and groans of thy heart with this compassionate Intercessor, who is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities," (Heb. iv. 15,) who sympathizes with our weaknesses. He that lies in the Father's bosom, and hath "expounded," ἐξηγησατο, the will of God to us, (John i. 18,) adds much incense to "the prayers of all saints before the throne" of God, and explains our wills to God; (Rev. viii. 3;) so that *our* prayers, perfumed by *his*, are "set forth as incense before" him. (Psalm cxli. 2.) He is the "days-man," (Job ix. 33,) the heavens-man betwixt God and us. Whatever we ask in his name, he puts into his golden censer, that the Father may give it to us. (John xv. 16; xvi. 23.) When the sweet smoke of the incense of Christ's prayer ascends before the Father, our prayers become sweet and amiable, and cause "a savour of rest" with God. (Gen. viii. 21.) This I take to be one reason why the prevalency of prayer is so often assigned to the time of the evening sacrifice,—pointing at the death of Christ, "about the ninth hour" of the day, near the time of the evening oblation. (Matt. xxvii. 46; Acts iii. 1; x. 30.) Hence it was that Abraham's sacrifice received a gracious answer, being offered about the going down of the sun. (Gen. xv. 12.) Isaac went out to pray "at eventide." (Gen. xxiv. 63.) Elijah, at mount Carmel, prays and offers "at the time of the evening sacrifice." (1 Kings xviii. 36.) Ezra "fell upon" his "knees, and spread out" his "hands, at the evening sacrifice." (Ezra ix. 5.) David begs that his prayer may be virtual in the power of "the evening sacrifice." (Psalm cxli. 2.) Daniel, at prayer, was touched by the angel "about the time of the evening oblation." (Dan. ix. 21.) All to show the prevalency of our access to the throne of grace by the virtuous merit of the intercession of Christ, the acceptable evening Sacrifice. Yea, and therefore we are taught in our Lord's prayer to begin with the title of a "Father:" in him we are adopted to children, and to use that prevalent relation as an argument in prayer. There are some other particulars in respect to prayer in general, as it may be connected and coincident with secret prayer, as stability of spirit, freedom from distraction by wandering thoughts, the actings of faith, the aids of the Spirit, &c., which I pass by, and come to the second branch.

DIRECTIONS SPECIAL AND PECULIAR TO SECRET PRAYER.

1. *Be sure of intimate acquaintance with God.*—Can we presume, that are but dust and ashes, to go up into heaven, and boldly to enter the presence-chamber, and have no fellowship with the Father, or with the Son? "Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace," &c. "Then shalt

thou have thy delight in the Almighty, and shalt lift up thy face unto God. Thou shalt make thy prayer unto him, and he shall hear thee." The decrees of thy heart "shall be established unto thee: and the light shall shine upon thy ways." (Job xxii. 21, 26—28.) First shining acquaintance, and then shining answers. (Job xxix. 3, 4.) Canst thou set thy face unto the Lord God? Then thou mayest seek him by prayer. First Daniel sets and shows his face to God, and then seeks him "by prayer and supplications." (Dan. ix. 3.) Does God know your face in prayer? Do you often converse in your closets with him? Believe it, it must be the fruit of intimate acquaintance with God, to meet him in secret with delight. Can ye come familiarly, as a child to a father, considering its own vileness, meanness, or unworthiness, in comparison with his divine love,—the love and bowels of a heavenly Father? Such a Father, the Father of fathers, and the Father of mercies! How sweetly does the apostle join it!—God is "our Father" because "the Father of our Lord;" and because his Father, and so our Father, therefore "the Father of mercies." (2 Cor. i. 2, 3.) O what generations of mercies flow from this paternity! But plead we must to that *προσαγωγή*, that "manuduction and access" to this Father through Christ by the Spirit. (Eph. ii. 18.) We must be gradually acquainted with all Three. First with the Spirit, then with Christ, and last with the Father: first God sends "the Spirit of his Son into our hearts," and then through the Son we cry, "Abba, Father." (Gal. iv. 6.) The bowels of mercy first wrought in the Father to us: he chose us in Christ, and then sends his Spirit to draw us to Christ, and by Christ to himself. (Eph. i. 4, 5.) Have ye this access to God by the Spirit? Bosom-communion flows from bosom-affection. If your souls are truly in love with God, he will graciously say to your petitions, "Be it unto you according to your love."

2. *Times of finding God.*—A godly man prays in finding seasons; when God's heart and ear are inclined to audience, when God is said to "bow down" his "ear unto" us. (Psalm xxxi. 2.) There are special seasons of drawing nigh to him, when he draws nigh to us, times when he "may be found." (Isai. lv. 6; Psalm xxxii. 6.) When thy "beloved looketh forth at the windows, showing himself through the lattice,"—that is a time of grace, when he knocks at the door of thy heart by his Spirit. (Canticles ii. 9; v. 2.) Motions upon the heart are like the doves of the East sent with letters about their necks; as he* said of Bernard, *Ex motu cordis Spiritus Sancti presentiam agnoscebat*: "He knew when the Holy Spirit was present with him, by the motion of his heart." When God reveals himself to the heart, he opens the ears of his servants for some gracious message. (2 Sam. vii. 27.) When God bids us "seek his face," then the soul must answer, "One thing have I desired, that will I seek after." (Psalm xxvii. 4, 8.) First holy desires warm the heart, and then set the soul on seeking. They are like messengers sent from heaven to bring us into his presence. Take heed, then, of quenching the Spirit of God. He "that is born of the Spirit" knows "the sound," *φωνήν*, "the voice of the Spirit." (John iii. 8.) When the soul is melted by the word, or softened by afflictions, or feels some holy groans and sighs excited by the Spirit, that is a warm time

* GERSON, tom. ii. 27, a.

for prayer; then we enjoy "the sense," το φρονημα του Πνευματος, "the intimations of the Spirit of God." (Rom. viii. 27.) Or when prophecies are nigh to expire, then there are great workings and searchings of heart in Daniel, Zachary, Simeon, and Anna. Or when some promise comes with applying power: "Therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee:" for "thou hast promised this goodness unto thy servant." (2 Sam. vii. 27, 28.) When we find promises dropped into the soul like wine, it causes "the lips of" them that were "asleep to speak." (Canticles vii. 9.)

3. *Keep conscience tender of, and clean from, secret sins.*—With what face can we go to a friend to whom we have given any secret affronts? And will ye be so bold as to come before the God of heaven, when he knows ye maintain some secret lust in your heart? Darest thou to bring a Delilah with thee into this sacred closet? True is that of Tertullian, *Quantum a preceptis, tantum ab auribus Dei longè sumus*.* He that turns his ear from God's precepts, must stop his mouth in the dust, if God turn his holy ears from his cries. (Prov. xxviii. 9.) When our secret sins are in the light of his countenance, we may rather expect to be "consumed by" his "anger, and troubled by" his "wrath." (Psalm xc. 7, 8.)

OBJECTION. "But, then, who may presume and venture into secret communion?"

ANSWER. True, if God should strictly mark what we do amiss, who can stand? David was sensible of this objection, but he answers it humbly: "There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." (Psalm cxxx. 3, 4.) If we come with holy purposes to leave all sin, he hath promised to "pardon abundantly." His thoughts and ways are not as ours: (Isai. lv. 7, 8:) guilt makes us fly his presence; but proclamation of pardoning grace to a wounded soul that comes for strength from heaven to subdue its iniquities, sweetly draws the soul to lie at his foot for mercy. (Micah vii. 19.) Though we cannot as yet be so free as formerly, while under the wounding sense of guilt, yet when he "restores to" us "the joy of his salvation," he will again "uphold" us with his "free Spirit." (Psalm li. 12.) Yet take heed of scars upon the soul. God "knows our foolishness; and our guiltinesses are not hid from him;" (Psalm lxix. 5;) yet we come for purging and cleansing mercy. A godly man may be under the sense of divine displeasure, for some iniquity that himself knoweth, as the Lord spake of Eli; (1 Sam. iii. 13;) yet the way to be cured is not to run from God, but, like the distressed woman, come fearing and trembling, and fall at his feet, and tell him all the truth. (Mark v. 33.) But if prayer have cured thee, sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee. For if we "regard iniquity in" our "heart, the Lord will not hear" us; (Psalm lxvi. 18;) but the guilt may stare conscience in the face with great amazement. As it is storied of one that secretly had stolen a sheep, it ran before his eyes in prayer [so] that he could have no rest. How strangely will memory ring the bell in the ears of conscience! If we have any secret sin *in deliciis*, if we look but asquint with desires and secret thoughts, after our "peace-

* *De Oratione*, p. 213. "Our distance from the ears of God is exactly proportionate to our departure from his precepts."—EDIT.

offerings," (Prov. vii. 14,) to meet our "beloved lusts" again, this is dangerous. God may justly give-up such to cast off that which is good, to cleave to their idols, and let them alone. (Hosea iv. 17; vi. 4.) But if the face of the heart be not knowingly and willingly spotted with any sin or lust, bating infirmities which he mourns under, then thy countenance through Christ will be comely in the eye of God, and thy voice sweet in his ears; and as he* said, *Qui bene vivit, semper orat*: "A holy life will be a walking continual prayer; his very life is a constant petition before God."

4. *Own thy personal interest with God, and plead it humbly.*—Consider whom thou goest to in secret: "Pray to thy Father who seeth in secret." Canst thou prove thyself to be in covenant? What thou canst prove thou mayest plead, and have it successfully issued. In prayer we take God's covenant into our mouths, but without a real interest: the Lord expostulates with such: What have they "to do with" it? (Psalm l. 15, 16.) God never graciously hears but it is upon interest. This argument Solomon presses in prayer: "For they be thy people, and thine inheritance." (1 Kings viii. 51.) Thus David pleads: "Thou art my God: hear the voice of my supplications." (Psalm cxl. 6.) "I am thine," Lord, "save me." (Psalm cxix. 94.) "Truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant." (Psalm cxvi. 16.) Arias turns *אֲנִי עַבְדְּךָ* by *obsecro, quæso*, "I beseech thee, O Lord, I am thy servant." God will "avenge his elect" when they cry unto him: "I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly." (Luke xviii. 7; Psalm xxii. 10.) Therefore Asa turns the contest heavenward: "O Lord, thou art our God; let not mortal man prevail against thee." (2 Chron. xiv. 11.) "Thou takest me for the 'sheep' of thy fold, and the 'servant' of thy household; therefore 'seek' me." (Psalm cxix. 176.) When Israel shall be refined as silver and tried as gold, "they shall call on" his "name, and" he "will hear them: I will say, It is my people," my tried, refined, golden people: "and they shall say, The Lord is my God." (Zech. xiii. 9.) When thou canst discern the print of the broad seal of the covenant upon thy heart, and the privy-seal of the Spirit upon thy prayers, and canst look upon the Son of God in a sacerdotal relation to thee, thou mayest "come boldly unto the throne of grace in time of need." (Heb. iv. 16.)

5. *Be very particular in secret prayer, both as to sins, wants, and mercies.* (Psalm xxxii. 5; li. 9.)—Hide none of thy transgressions, if thou expect a pardon. Be not ashamed to open all thy necessities. David argues, because he is "poor and needy;" four several times he presses his wants and exigences before God, like an earnest but holy beggar; (Psalm xl. 17; lxx. 5; lxxxvi. 1; cix. 22;) and "showed before him" his "trouble," (Psalm cxlii. 2,) from *נֶגַע*, *coram*, presents "before" him his ragged condition, and spreads open his secret wounds; as Job said, He "would order" his "cause before him," (Job xxiii. 4,) from *אָרַךְ*, *disponerem, instruerem*, "marshal" every case as a battle in rank and file. There we may speak out our minds fully, and name the persons that afflict, affront, and trouble us; and woe to them that a child of God upon a mature judgment names in prayer! I find not

* GERSON, tom. ii. p. 76, 6.

that such a prayer in scripture returned empty. Jacob, in a great strait: "Deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau." (Gen. xxxii. 11.) David, in the ascent of Mount Olivet: "O Lord, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness." Prayer twisted the rope for him at Giloh. (2 Sam. xv. 12, 31; xvii. 23.) Thus Jehoshaphat in his prayer names Ammon, Moab, and Edom conspiring against him. (2 Chron. xx. 10.) Thus Hezekiah spreads the railing letter before the Lord; (Isai. xxxvii. 14;) and the Psalmist takes *them* all in a round catalogue *that* consulted against Israel. (Psalm lxxxiii. 5—8.) Thus the church in her prayer names Herod Antipas and Pontius Pilate; (Acts iv. 27;) whereof the first was sent into perpetual banishment, and the latter slew himself.* It is of great use in prayer to attend to some special case or single request with arguments and affections suitable. "For this cause," says Paul, "I bow my knees." (Eph. iii. 14.) Suppose a grace deficient in its strength: "Lord, increase our faith;" (Luke xvii. 5;) or a temptation urgent: "For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me." (2 Cor. xii. 8.) A great reason why we reap so little benefit by prayer [is], because we rest too much in generals; and if we have success, it is but dark, [so] that often we cannot tell what to make of the issues of prayer. Besides, to be particular in our petitions would keep the spirit much from wandering, when we are intent upon a weighty case, and the progress of the soul in grace would manifest its gradual success in prayer.

6. *Holy and humble appeals before the Lord in secret, when the soul can submissively and thankfully expose itself to divine searching about some measures of holiness and grace wrought in the heart.*—The soul cannot bide by the presence of God under flashings of defilement; *neque agnoscere poterit a Spiritu Sancto spiritus inquinatus*; "neither will the Holy Spirit own a defiled soul."† But when a person can humbly, modestly, and reverently say, "Search me, and try my reins; and see if there be any way of wickedness in me, and lead me in the everlasting way;" (Psalm xxvi. 2; cxxxix. 23, 24;) it will be the means of the ebullitions and boilings-up of joyful affections and meek confidence at the footstool of grace, especially in pleas of deliverance from wicked and proud enemies. When David can plead in comparison with, and in the case stated between, his enemies and himself, "For I am holy," it shows him "a token for good." (Psalm lxxxvi. 2, 14, 17.) Or when we plead against the assaults of Satan, can we be conscious that we have watched and prayed against entering into temptation? When in the main we can "wash" our "hands in innocency," we may then comfortably compass God's altar about. (Psalm xxvi. 6.) In case of opposition and injustice: "He rewarded me," says David, in the point of Saul, "according to my righteousness, and to the cleanness of my hands before him." (Psalm xviii. 20; vii. 3—5.) Or about the truth of the love that is in the heart to God: "Thou that knowest all things," says Peter, "knowest that I love thee." (John xxi. 17.) As to zeal for the worship and ordinances of God, so did Nehemiah. (Neh. xiii. 14, 22.) As to the integrity of a well-spent life, so did Hezekiah. (Isai. xxxviii. 3.) Or if we cannot rise

* JOSEPHUS, lib. xviii. cap. 9. EUSEBIUS PAMPHILI *Chronicon*. lib. ii. p. 159. † TERTULLIANUS *De Oratione*, p. 213.

so high, yet [we may say] as the church did, "The desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee." (Isai. xxvi. 8.) Or, lastly, when we can unfeignedly plead the usefulness of a mercy entreated, in order to the divine glory; as when a minister, or the church of Christ for him, prays for such gifts and graces, such knowledge and "utterance," that he may win souls to Christ, and can appeal that it is his principal aim; (Eph. vi. 19; Col. iv. 3;) this is glorious.

7. *Pray for the Spirit, that ye may pray in and by the Spirit.*—Awaken the north and the south to "blow upon thy garden, that the spices thereof may flow forth." Then thou mayest invite Christ: "Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits;" (Canticles iv. 16;) that the soul may enjoy him, and hold sweet communion with him. All successful prayer is from the breathing of the Spirit of God, when he inspires and indites, when he directs the heart as to matter, and governs the tongue as to utterance. (1 Cor. ii. 13.) God graciously hears the sighs of his own Spirit formed in us. (Rom. viii. 26, 27.) He sent forth his Spirit, "and the waters flow." (Psalm cxlvii. 18.) That I may allude: the waters of contrition flow upon the breathing of the Spirit; and the soul is, as it were, all afloat before the throne of grace, when these living waters issue from under the threshold of the sanctuary. (Ezek. xlvii. 1.) *Sequitur lachrymosa devotio flante Spiritu Sancto*: "Devout tears drop down from the Spirit's influences." * Melting supplications follow the infusions of grace by the Spirit. Then "they shall mourn for" piercing of Christ, says the prophet, "and shall be in bitterness, as for a first-born: like the mourning at the town of Hadadrimmon," where Josiah was slain. (Zech. xiii. 10, 11.) Then, "in that day," what inundations of mercy shall refresh the church, when the Lord "will extend her peace like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream;" great things to the church, and gracious things to the soul! (Isai. lxvi. 12; Zech. xiii. 1, 2, 4; xiv. 8.) *Inter orationem suspiria cognoscit*: "Holy sighs in prayer give intelligence of great mercies to follow."† Nay, to withstand powerfully all the wiles of Satan, one means is, to consecrate every part of the spiritual armour by "prayer in the Spirit." (Eph. vi. 18.)

8. *Apply special promises to special cases in prayer.*—"For God hath [magnified]" and will magnify his "word" of promise "above all his name." (Psalm cxxxviii. 2.) When we are under the word of command for a duty, we must seek for a word of promise, and unite them in prayer. (John xii. 28.) When a promise of aid suits to the precept, it renders prayer victorious, and obedience pleasant: when we come with God's own words into his presence, when we take his words with us that he would "take away all iniquity," he will "receive us graciously." (Hosea xiv. 2.) Jacob urged that God had bid him return unto his country and kindred. (Gen. xxxii. 9.) Solomon urges the word of promise to David. (1 Kings viii. 24.) Jehoshaphat urges the word of promise to Solomon. (2 Chron. xx. 8, 9.) Daniel fills his mouth with the promise given to Jeremiah; he reads, and then applies it in prayer. (Dan. ix. 2, 3.) First, search the Bible, and look for a promise; and

* GERSON, tom. ii. KK. iv. 49.

† RICHARDUS DE SANCTO VICTORE, *ult.* p. 321.

when found, open it before the Lord. Paul teaches us to take the promise given to Joshua, and then to "say boldly, The Lord is our helper," &c. (Heb. xiii. 5, 6.) For the special ground of the answer of prayer lies in the performance of a promise. (Psalm l. 15; lxxv. 2, 4.) Simeon lived upon a promise, and expired sweetly in the arms of a promise in the breathings of a prayer. (Luke ii. 29.) Sometimes the soul depends for an answer by virtue of the covenant in general; as of that, "I will be thy God;" (Gen. xvii. 7, 8;) sometimes, by the great Remembrancer, "draws water out of some well of salvation:" (John xiv. 26; Isai. xii. 3;) but in both, God's faithfulness is the soul's surety. Hence it is that David in prayer does so often argue upon the veracity and truth of God; and the church, in Micah, is so confident that "the mercy" promised "to Abraham, and confirmed in truth to Jacob," should be plentifully performed to his people Israel. (Micah vii. 20.)

9. *Sober and serious resolutions before God in prayer.*—Psalm cxix. is full of these: "I will keep thy statutes." (Verse 8.) "I will run the way of thy commandments." (Verse 32.) "I will speak of thy testimonies before kings." (Verse 46.) "I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments." (Verse 106.) And elsewhere: "Quicken us, and we will call upon thy name." (Psalm lxxx. 18.) And again: "O when wilt thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart." (Psalm ci. 2.) "Visit me with answers of mercy to prayer;" and then the soul makes holy stipulations and compacts of obedience to God. Thus Jacob: "If God will be with me, then shall the Lord be my God;" and resolves upon a house for God, and reserving the tenth of all his estate to his service and worship: (Gen. xxviii. 20—22;) where the particle *אם*, *if*, "if," is not to be taken for a single conditional, as [that] if God should not bestow what he promised, he should not be his God; that were a great wickedness: but it is a rational particle, or of order and time: * "Because," or, "Since God is graciously pleased to promise, I will acknowledge him to be the God whom I adore, by erecting a temple, and paying tithes to maintain his worship." (Gen. xxxv. 3.) But whatever it is that the soul in distress does offer to God in promise, be not slack to perform; for many times answers of prayer may delay till we have performed our promises. (Eccles. v. 4.) David professes to pay what his lips had uttered in trouble; for God had heard him. (Psalm lxvi. 13—19.) If we break our words to God, no wonder if we feel what the Lord threatened to Israel, that they should "know his breach of promise." (Num. xiv. 34.)

10. *A waiting frame of spirit in prayer.*—"I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry." (Psalm xl. 1.) *קיוו קִוִּיתִּי*, "I expected with expectation:" he walked up and down in the gallery of prayer. This is set forth by hope till God hear: "In thee, O Lord, do I hope: thou wilt hear, O Lord my God." (Psalm xxxviii. 15.) "Our eyes" must "wait upon the Lord our God, until he have mercy upon us, more than they that watch for the morning;" (Psalm cxxiii. 2; cxxx. 6;) and persist praying: "Cause us to hear thy loving-kindness in the morning; for in thee do we

* RIVETUS in loc. p. 489.

trust ;" (Psalm cxliii. 8 ;) and say, with Micah : " I will look unto the Lord ; I will wait for the God of my salvation : my God will hear me ;" (Micah vii. 7 ;) hoping, expecting, trusting, living upon the promise, and looking for an answer of peace ; as he* said of prayer, *Sagitta moeetur post quietem sagittantis, et navis quiescentibus nautis* : " When an archer shoots an arrow, he looks after it with his glass, to see how it hits the mark." So says the soul : " I will attend and watch how my prayer flies towards the bosom of God, and what messages return from heaven." " As the seaman, when he has set sail, goes to the helm and the compass, and sits still" and observes the sun or the pole-stars, and how the ship works, and how the land-marks form themselves aright according to his chart : so do you, when you have been at prayer : mark your ship how it makes the port, and what rich goods are laden back again from heaven. Most men lose their prayers in the mists and fogs of non-observation : and thus we arrive at the second question.

QUESTION II. *How to discover and discern answers to secret prayer, that the soul may be satisfied that it hath prevailed with God.*

Let us now consider the ἀποδοσις, " rendition or reply " to prayer, in the text. He will return it into your bosoms. And as to this in general, when the mercy sought-for is speedily and particularly cast into your arms ; like the irrational creatures [which] in their natural cries seek their meat from God, and gather what he gives them, and " are filled with good ;" (Psalm civ. 28 ; cxlvii. 9 ;) when God openly returns to his children, there is no further dispute : for the worst of men will acknowledge the divine bounty, when he fills their " hearts with food and gladness." (Acts xiv. 17.)

OBSERVATIONS.

OBSERV. I. But when cases are a little dubious, observe the frame and temper of thy spirit in prayer.—How the heart works and steers its course in several particulars :—

1. *A holy liberty of spirit is commonly an excellent sign of answers, a copious spirit of fluency to pour out requests as out of a fountain.* (2 Cor. iii. 17.)—As God shuts-up opportunities, so he shuts-up hearts, when he is not inclined to hear. The heart is sometimes locked up that it cannot pray ; or if it does and will press on, it finds a straitness, as if the Lord had spoken, as once to Moses, " Speak no more unto me of this matter ;" (Deut. iii. 26 ;) or as God spake to Ezekiel, " Though Noah, Daniel, and Job " should entreat for a nation, when the time of a land is come, there is no salvation but for " their own souls." (Ezek. xiv. 14 ; vii. 2, 7, 11.) When God intends to take away near relations or any of his saints unto himself, many times neither the church of God nor dear friends have either apt seasons or hearts to enlarge ; the bow of prayer does not abide in strength. God took away gracious Josiah suddenly : the church had time to write a book of Lamentations, and to make it " an ordinance in Israel," but no time for deprecation of the divine displeasure in it. (2 Chron. xxxv. 25.) But in Hezekiah's case there was both a season and a heart enlarged in

* GERSON.

prayer, and the prophet crying for a sign of the mercy. (2 Kings xx. 11.) Holy James might be quickly dispatched by the sword of Herod Agrippa; but the church had time for supplication in behalf of Peter. (Acts xii. 2, 12.) When the Lord is pleased graciously to grant space of time and enlargement of heart, it is a notable sign of success. "Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress," says David. (Psalm iv. 1.) Though it be meant of deliverance, yet it may be applied to prayer, as the holy prophet seems to do. Yea, though the soul may be under some sense of displeasure and in extremities, yet [it] lifts up a cry; (Psalm xviii. 6;) when conscience stops the mouth of hypocrites, that they shun and fly the presence of God.

2. *A blessed serenity and quiet calmness of spirit in time of prayer.*—Especially when the soul comes troubled and clouded at first, whilst it poured out its complaints before the Lord; but at length, *nescio quid serenius emicat*, &c.,* "the sun shines forth brightly, and the heavens look serenely and cheerfully upon the soul in prayer." It is said of Hannah, She "was no more sad," Hebrew, "her countenance was not," עֵינֶיהָ לֹא יָלְדָה *illi ulterius*, "any longer in the old huc," cast down and sorrowful because of her rival. (1 Sam. i. 18.) Thus the Lord dealt with David, though not yet fully answered, yet filled with holy fortitude of spirit, and "revived in the midst of" his "trouble." (Psalm cxxxviii. 3, 7.) Prayer dispels anxious solicitude, and chases away black thoughts from the heart; it eases [the] conscience, and fills the soul with "the peace of God." (Phil. iv. 6, 7.)

3. *A joyful frame of spirit.*—God sometimes makes his people not only peaceful but "joyful in" his "house of prayer." (Isai. lvi. 7.) Thus sped Hezekiah, when his crane-like chatterings were turned into swan-like songs, and his mournful elegies into glorious praises upon ten-stringed "instruments in the house of the Lord." (Isai. xxxviii. 14, 20.) The "lips" of Habakkuk "quivered," and his "belly trembled;" but before he finished, his voice was voluble in holy songs, and his fingers nimble upon the harp. (Hab. iii. 16, 19.) Thus, at Solomon's prayer, when the fire came down, the people were warmed at worship, and went away "glad and merry at heart." (2 Chron. vii. 1, 10.) David's experience of this sent him often to the house of God for comfort; and [he] thus chides his soul when cast down at any time: "I am going to the altar of God; unto God my exceeding joy. Why art thou disquieted within me?" (Psalm xliii. 4, 5.) His old harp, that had cured Saul of his malignant dumps, being played upon with temple-songs, now cures his own spiritual sadness. When we look upon God with an eye of faith in prayers, it "enlightens" our faces with heavenly joy. (Psalm xxxiv. 5.) When Moses came out of the mount from communion with God, how illustrious was his face from that heavenly vision! Wherefore prayer for divine mercy and comfort sometimes exhibits itself in this language: "Cause thy face to shine" upon us; "and we shall be saved." (Psalm lxxx. 3.) On this wise the priests of old were to bless the children of Israel: "The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee." (Num. vi. 25.) These and the like expressions in scripture

* HIERONYMUS.

import that sometimes the Lord was pleased to give forth a shining glory from the oracle, and thereby made known his presence unto his people, and filled them with awful impressions of his majesty and mercy. (Exod. xl. 34; Lev. ix. 23; Num. xvi. 19, 42; xx. 6; 1 Kings viii. 11.) This joyful light of God's countenance is like the sun rising upon the face of the earth: it chaseth away the dark fears and discouragements of the night. Such heavenly joy shows the strength of faith in prayer, and the radiant appearances of God; yea, to this end all prayer should be directed, that our "joy may be full." (John xvi. 24.)

4. *A sweetness of affection to God, when the soul has gracious sentiments of God in prayer.*—Clouds of jealousies and suspicions of the divine mercy, as if God were a hard master, are marvellously unbecoming a soul that should go to God as to a father; and hence, from such unsuitable thoughts of infinite mercy, to hide the talent of prayer is greatly provoking. Whereas the apprehension of God's excellent goodness should work the heart into lovely thoughts of God. Man, but especially a saint, is *acervus beneficiorum Dei*,* "an accumulated heap of divine favours;" and if nothing but the gifts of mercy should attract our hearts, yet herein we are every moment laden with his numerous benefits. But when the soul comes to perceive that all flows from the fountain of his eternal love, it makes prayer to be *res amorosa*, to be "filled with holy delights and joys." The ecstasies of love often rise upon the soul in secret; and such divine affection, as Gerson said, it is *res ecstastica*, † "it carries the soul beyond itself." Let the profane world say what they will, when spiritual ardours, like so many fragrant spices, flow out of the soul; "I love the Lord," says David, "because he hath heard my supplications." (Psalm cxvi. 1.) As answers of prayer flow from the love of the Father, (John xvi. 27,) so suitable workings of holy affections flow from the hearts of children. When the soul is filled with gracious intimations, like those of the angelical voice to Daniel, "O Daniel, greatly beloved, O man of desires," to stand before the King of Saints; (Dan. ix. 23; x. 11;) or like that to the Holy Virgin, "Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee;" (Luke i. 28;) how greatly does it inflame the heart to God!

5. *Inward encouragements sometimes spring in upon the heart in prayer from remembrance of former experiments, which mightily animate the soul with fervency.*—When Moses calls to mind that God had forgiven and delivered, from Egypt until then, immediately follows a sweet intimation of mercy: "I have pardoned according to thy word." (Num. xiv. 19, 20.) When the soul considers the days of old, the years of ancient times, and "calls to remembrance" its former "songs in the night," he draws an argument out of the quiver of experience: "Will God be favourable no more? Can he forget to be gracious? Can he in anger shut up his tender mercies?" The soul concludes this thought to flow from its own "infirmity;" (Psalm lxxvii. 5—10;) for when God once hears a prayer, as coming from a child of his in covenant, prove our filial interest, we may sweetly rest assured in all things according to his will to be always heard.

* GUIL. PARIENSIS, p. 376.

† GERSON, tom. ii. KK. 4.

6. *A ready heart for thankfulness and service.*—The heart is brimful, and ready to flow-over in grateful memorials of his mercy. “What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?” (Psalm cxvi. 12.) As of old at temple-sacrifices there was music, so it ought to be now: while the mercy is praying for, the heart must be winding up and tuning for praise. The “vials full of the odours” of prayer are joined with harps for heavenly melody: (Rev. v. 8:) when the “heart is fixed” or prepared, then follows song and praise. (Psalm cviii. 1.) This streams from the sense of divine love; and love is the fountain of thankfulness and of all sprightly and vigorous services. That prayer that does not end in cheerful obedience, is called by Cyprian * *oratio sterilis* and *preces nudæ*, “barren and unfruitful, naked and without ornament;” and so we may glance upon the expression of holy James, the *δεησις ενεργουµενη* (James v. 16;) “a working prayer” within will be working without, and demonstrate the labour of love.

OBSERV. II. *The principal subject-matter of prayer, the mark, the white that the arrow of prayer is shot-at, the scope it aims at.*—There is usually some special sin unconquered, some untamed corruption, some defect, some pressing strait that drives the soul to prayer, and is the main burden of the spirit: take notice how such a sin withers, or such a grace flourishes, or such a need [is] supplied upon the opening our hearts in prayer. “Watch unto prayer:” (Eph. vi. 18:) watch to perform it, and then to expound the voice of the divine oracle, and to know that ye are successful. Cry to thy soul by way of holy soliloquy: “Watchman, what of the night?” (Isai. xxi. 11.)

OBSERV. III. *Ensuing providences.*—Set a vigilant eye upon succeeding passages; examine them as they pass before thee; set a wakeful sentinel at the posts of wisdom. “That his name is near, his wondrous works declare;” (Psalm lxxv. 1;) his name of truth, his glorious title of hearing prayers. When prayer is gone up by the help of the Spirit, mark how “all things work together for good,” and note the connexion there: the working of things together follows the intercession of the Spirit for all saints. (Rom. viii. 27, 28.) God is pleased often to speak so clearly by his works, as if he said, “Here I am; I will ‘guide thee continually: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.’” (Isai. lviii. 9, 11.) Secret promises animate prayer, and open providences expound it. Cyrus was promised to come against Babylon for the church’s sake: but Israel must ask it of God; and they had a word for it, that they should not seek his face in vain; (Isai. xlv. 4, 11, 19;) and then follows Babylon’s fall in the succeeding chapters. When we cry unto the Lord in trouble, he sends his word of command, and heals us. (Psalm cvii. 19, 20.) There is a set time of mercy, a time of life. When Abraham had prayed for a son, the Lord told him, “At the time appointed I will return.” (Gen. xv. 2; xviii. 10, 14.) In a great extremity, after the solemn fast of three days by the Jews in Shushan and the queen in her palace, on the fourth day at night the king could not sleep, and must hear the chronicles of Persia read; and then follows Haman’s ruin. (Esther iv. 16; vi. 1.) Prayer has a strange virtue to give quiet sleep sometimes to a David, (Psalm iii. 4, 5,) and

* *De Oratione*, p. 107.

sometimes a waking pillow for the good of the church.* When Jacob had done wrestling, and the angel gone at the springing of the morning, then the good man saw the angel of God's presence in the face of Esau. [Gen. xxxiii. 1.] Sometimes Providence is not so quick. The martyrs' prayer as to complete answer is deferred for a season; but long white robes are given to every one, a triumphant frame of spirit, and [they are] told they should wait but a little season till Divine Justice should work-out the issue of prayer. (Rev. vi. 11.) The thunder upon God's enemies comes out of the temple, the judgments roar out of Zion, the place of divine audience; but the means, and methods, and times of God's working are various, such as we little forethink. (Rev. xi. 19; Joel iii. 16.) Submit all to his infinite wisdom; prescribe not, but observe, the embroidery of Providence; it is difficult to spell its characters sometimes, but it is rare employment. His works are searched into by such as delight in his providences, for all things are beautiful in his season. (Isai. lxiv. 5; Psalm cxi. 2; Eccles. iii. 11.)

OBSERV. IV. *Mark thy following communion with God.*—Inward answers make the soul vegete and lively; like plants, [which,] after the shining of the sun upon rain, lift up their heads, and shoot-forth their flowers. (2 Sam. xxiii. 4.) A saint in favour does all with delight. Answer of prayer is like oil to the spirits, and "beauty for ashes:" the sackcloth of mournful fasting is turned to a wedding garment. (Isai. lxi. 3.) He grows more free and yet humbly familiar with heaven. This is one I would wish you to pick acquaintance with, that can come and have what he will at court. (John xvi. 23.) As the Lord once told a king by night, that Abraham was a prophet, and would pray for him. (Gen. xx. 7.) He was acquainted with the King of heaven. O blessed person! I hope there are many such among you, whose life is a continued prayer: as David that gave himself to prayer. (Psalm cix. 4.) Hebrew, "But I prayer:" he is all over prayer, prays at rising, prays at lying down, prays as he walks; he is always ready for prayer, like a prime favourite at court, that has the golden key to the privy stairs, and can wake his prince by night. Christians, there are such (whatever the besotted, profane world dreams) who are ready for spiritual ascents at all seasons, beside the frequency of set communions. His wings never weary: his willing spirit is flying continually, and makes God the "rock of his dwelling," *צור מורא* into which he may upon all assaults have holy retirements. (Psalm lxxi. 3.)

But so much for the main question, with its branches. There be many particular queries of some weight that may attend the principal subject, and such I shall briefly reply to; as,

QUERY I. "What is the proper time for secret prayer?"

ANSWER. Various providences, different temperaments and frames of spirits, motions from heaven, opportunities dictate variously. Some find it best at even; others, in the night, when all is silent; others, at morning, when the spirits are freshest. I think, with respect to others, that conscientious prudence must guide in such cases, when others are retired, and the spirit in the best frame for communion.

* Eliezer, Gen. xxiv. 15.

QUERY II. "How often should we pray in secret?"

ANSWER. If we consult scripture-precedent, we find David at prayer in the morning, (Psalm v. 3,) our blessed Lord early before day in the morning, (Mark i. 35.) Chrysostom advises, *Νίψον προ του σωματος την ψυχην*, &c. : * "Wash thy soul before thy body;" for as the face and hands are cleansed by water, so is the soul by prayer. At another time our Lord went to secret prayer in the even; (Matt. xiv. 23;) and Isaac went to prayer in the eventide. (Gen. xxiv. 63.) David and Daniel prayed three times a day; (Psalm lv. 17; Dan. vi. 10;) and once it is mentioned that David said, "Seven times a day do I praise thee," that is, very often. (Psalm cxix. 164.) Such cases may happen that may require frequent accesses to the throne of grace in a day; but I humbly think, at the least once a day, which seems to be imported by that passage in our Lord's prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread;" since, after our Lord's appointment of secret prayer in the text, he gives this prayer as a pattern to his disciples.

QUERY III. "When persons are under temptations or disturbance by passions, is it expedient then to pray?"

ANSWER. Since we are enjoined to "lift up holy hands, without wrath and doubting," (1 Tim. ii. 8,) I judge it not so proper to run immediately to prayer; but with some foregoing ejaculations for pardon and strength against such exorbitances, and when in some measure cooled and composed, then speed to prayer, and take heed that the "sun go not down upon your wrath," (Eph. iv. 26,) without holy purgation by prayer: though I must confess, a Christian should always endeavour to keep his course and heart in such a frame as not to be unfit for prayer upon small warnings. The very consideration of our frequent communion with God should be a great bar to immoderate and exuberant passions.

QUERY IV. "Whether may we pray in secret, when others must needs take notice of our retirement?"

ANSWER. I must confess, in a strait house, and when a person can many times find no seasons but such as will fall under observation, I think he ought not to neglect secret duty, (if his heart be right before God,) for fear of others' notice. We must prevent it as much as may be, and especially watch our hearts against spiritual pride; and God may graciously turn it to a testimony and for example to others.

QUERY V. "Whether we may be vocal in secret prayer, if we cannot so well raise or keep-up affection, or preserve the heart from wandering, without it?"

ANSWER. No doubt; but yet there must be used a great deal of wise caution about extending the voice. That of Tertullian, counselling persons at prayer, *Ne ipsis quidem manibus sublimius elatis, &c., ne vultu quidem in audaciam erecto. Sonos etiam vocis subjectos esse oportet; aut quantis arteriis opus est, si pro sono audiamur! &c. Qui clarius adorant, proximis obstrepunt; imò prodendo orationes suas, quid minus faciunt quam si in publico orent?*† advises that both hands and countenance and voice should be ordered with great reverence and humility. "What arteries need we, if we think to be heard for noise! and what else do we by discovering our prayers, than if we prayed in public?" Yet

* CHRYSOSTOMUS, in *Psalmum v.* p. 542. *Etim.*

† *De Oratione.*

surely if we can obtain some very private place, or when others are from home, and the extension of the voice be found to some persons by long experience to be of use, such may lawfully improve it to their private benefit.

QUERY VI. "How to keep the heart from wandering thoughts in prayer?"

ANSWER. Although it be exceedingly difficult to attain so excellent a frame, yet by frequent reflecting upon and remembering the eye of God in secret, by endeavouring to fix the heart with all possible watchfulness upon the main scope of prayer in hand, by being very sensible of our wants and indigences, by not studying of impertinent length, but rather being more frequent and short, considering God is in heaven and we upon earth, and by exercise of holy communion, as we may through the implored assistance of the Spirit attain some sweetness and freedom, so likewise some more fixedness of spirit in our addresses before the Lord. (Eccles. v. 2.)

QUERY VII. "What, if present answers seem not to correspond to our petitions?"

ANSWER. We must not conclude it by and by to be a token of displeasure, and say, with Job, "Show me wherefore thou contendest with me;" (Job x. 2;) but acknowledge the sovereignty of divine wisdom and love in things that seem contrary to us in petitions for temporal mercies, and submit to the counsel of Elihu: "Since he giveth not account of any of his matters," neither can we find out the unsearchable methods of his holy ways to any perfection. (Job xxxiii. 13; xi. 7.)

There be other cases and scruples that might be treated of, as about prescript words in secret prayers, to which I need say but little; since such as are truly converted have the promise of the Spirit of God to assist and enable them, (Gal. iv. 6; Rom. viii. 26; Zech. xii. 10; Acts ix. 11,) and *they* need not drink of another's bucket *that* have the fountain, nor use stilts and crutches *that* have spiritual strength; neither are words and phrases, but faith and holy groans, the nerves of prayer. Yet for some help to young beginners, doubtless it is of use to observe the style of the Spirit, as well as the heavenly matter of several prayers in the holy scriptures.

Neither need I to press frequency to a holy heart that is fallen in love with spiritual communion; for he delights to be continually with him, the thoughts of God are so precious to him. (Psalm xxiii. 6; cxxxix. 17, 18.) His soul is even sick of affection, and prays to be "stayed with" more of the "flagons," and "comforted with the apples" in greater abundance. (Canticles ii. 5.) To some (though I fear how few) [asking] how far it is lawful and expedient to withdraw for the necessity of the frail body in this vale of tears, it may be replied that "the Lord is very pitiful" and gracious to our frailties, that he had rather have mercy than sacrifice in some cases. (James v. 11; Hosea vi. 6.) Though I doubt these phenixes are but rare that are in danger of expiring in prayer, as martyrs of divine love, as Gerson expresses.*

Having now finished, with what brevity I could, the foregoing queries, I should treat about short, sudden, occasional prayers, commonly called "ejaculations;" but, indeed, that requires a set and just discourse. Yet,

* GERSON, tom. ii. KK. 5.

because of a promise above-recited, I shall give a few tastes of it, and then conclude with some application.

EJACULATORY PRAYER

Is a sudden, short breathing of the soul towards heaven upon instant and surprising emergencies. In holy persons it is quick and lively, rising from a vehement ardour of spirit, swifter than the flight of eagles, and keeps pace with a flash of lightning. It flies upon the wings of a holy thought into the third heavens in the twinkling of an eye, and fetches auxiliary forces in times of straits.

There are many precedents recorded in sacred page upon great and notable occasions, with strange success. When good magistrates are busy in the work of reformation, let them imitate Nehemiah when redressing the profanation of the sabbath: "Remember me, O my God, concerning this," &c. (Neh. xiii. 14, 22.) When generals and captains go forth to war, observe Israel's appreciation to God, rather than acclamations to men: "The Lord thy God be with thee, as he was with Moses." (Joshua i. 17.) In time of battles or pursuit of the enemy, valiant Joshua darts up such a prayer as this, "O that the Lord would lengthen this triumphant day!" and the Lord heard his voice. (Joshua x. 12.) The tribes beyond Jordan [cried unto the Lord] in a battle with the Hagarites; (1 Chron. v. 20;) Jehoshaphat, in a sore strait at Ramoth-Gilead; (2 Chron. xviii. 31;) Samson, ready to perish at Lehi with thirst, and, when blind, exposed to contempt in the temple of Dagon; (Judges xv. 18; xvi. 28;) David, near stoning at Ziklag, and when flying from Absalom in "the ascent of Mount Olivet;" (1 Sam. xxx. 6; 2 Sam. xv. 31;) Elisha, at Dothan, compassed with a Syrian host, "Lord, open the young man's eyes;" (2 Kings vi. 17;) in the midst of lawful and laborious callings, Boaz, to the reapers, "The Lord be with you." (Ruth ii. 4; Psalm cxxix. 8.) We may pray "that our oxen may be strong to labour; that there be no breaking in, nor going out; that there be no complaining in our streets." (Psalm cxliv. 14.) It sanctifies the plough, as Jerome said of the fields of Bethlehem: *Quocunque te verteris, arator, stivam tenens, alleluja decantat, &c.,** "The tillers of the field, and the dressers of vineyards, sang David's psalms." It keeps the shop, and inclines the hearts of customers; it bars the doors, it quenches fire, it "blesseth thy children within thee," it "preserves thy going out and coming in." (Psalm cxlvii. 13; cxxi. 8.) Jacob found it to rest upon his children going a journey to Egypt. (Gen. xliii. 14.) It closes the eyes with sweet sleep, it "gives songs in the night," and wakens the soul in the arms of mercy. (Job xxxv. 10; Psalm iii. 5; iv. 8; cxxxix. 18.) It sits at the helm when a storm rises at sea; it gives strength to anchors in roads, and prosperous gales to the venturous merchant. (Psalm cvii. 28; Jonah i. 6.) When, in the palace at dinner, Nehemiah presents the cup to his prince, he presents also a *nichtam*, a "golden prayer" to the King of heaven. (Neh. ii. 4.) At the reading of the law Josiah was heard as to some secret cries to heaven. (2 Chron. xxxiv. 27.) At a holy conference in a journey the disciples occasionally pray, "Lord, increase our faith." (Luke xvii. 5.) Jacob on his dying

* *Ad Marcellum*, p. 129, tom. i.

pillow, predicting future events to his children, falls into a holy rapture : "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord." (Gen. xlix. 18.) At sacred death in martyrdom Zechariah cries out, "The Lord look upon it, and require it;" (2 Chron. xxiv. 22;) and Stephen, under a shower of stones, melts in prayers for the stony hearts that flung them : "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge;" (Acts vii. 60;) and our blessed Saviour in his greatest agonies makes a tender-hearted prayer : "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." (Luke xxiii. 34.) And, lastly, in the distresses of others, Eli puts-up a sudden petition for Hannah : "The God of Israel grant thee thy petition." (1 Sam. i. 17.)

In these and many like cases, the holy word stores us with patterns for ejaculation in all extremities, which I cannot now digest and improve. Only in a few words let us take a view of the usefulness of such a sudden flight of the soul to heaven.

1. It helps us to a speedy preparative for all duties. With such an ejaculation, "let us lift our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens." (Lam. iii. 41.)

2. It is a guard against secret sins in the first risings, and the first assaults of temptation.

3. It suffers not divine mercies to slip-by unobserved in a wakeful Christian, and proves a fruitful mother of gratitude and praise.

4. It sanctifies all our worldly employments; (1 Tim. iv. 4, 5;) it fastens the stakes in the hedge of divine protection, and turns every thing to a blessing.

5. It is a saint's buckler against sudden accidents, a present antidote against frights and evil tidings. It is good at all occasions, and consecrates to us, not only our meals, but every gasp of air, &c.

6. It is a sweet companion, that the severest enemies cannot abridge us of. Outward ordinances and closet duties they may cut off; the little "nail in the holy place" they may pluck out. (Ezra ix. 8.) But no labyrinth, no prison, not the worst of company can hinder this; *cælo restat iter*; in the very face of adversaries "we may lift our souls to God." No more of this. Let us briefly conclude with some uses.

USES.

USE I. *To convince such of their dangerous state that neglect secret duties.*—That have no heart-communion, that draw no water out of this sealed fountain; (Canticles iv. 12;) but all they do is in public only. It is a suspicious token of hypocrisy, since the kernel and soul of religion lies so much in the heart and closet. Mark the phrase in the text, how it varies : "Thy Father which is in secret, which seeth in secret." God's eye is open upon thee in the closet; and if thy eye be open upon his, thou mayest see a glorious beauty. The excellency of grace lies in making conscience of secret sins and secret duties.

USE II. *To examine such as perform secret duty, but not from a sincere principle.*—Like Amaziah, that prays, "but not with a perfect heart." (2 Chron. xxv. 2.) Like Ahab, they mourn, but with crocodile tears. Such as do it only because they find precept or example for it, and, therefore, to quiet conscience, will into secret, but converse only in the shell and trunk of a duty; that rest in the naked performance, but

matter not whether they taste of the sweet streams that flow in from heaven in the golden pipe of an ordinance; what account can such render, that go into their closets but, like Domitian, to catch flies only;* and when the doors are shut to the world, their hearts are shut to heaven and communion with God? He that sees in secret beholds the evil frame of such a heart, and will one day openly punish it.

USE III. *To excite and awaken all to this excellent duty, and to manage it in an excellent manner.*—Would ye live delightfully? would ye translate heaven to earth? Then keep-up communion in secret prayer, to know Him, to discern His face, to behold the lustre of His eye that shines in secret. Remember the glorious Person that meets [you] in your closets: all the world yields not such a glittering beauty as a gracious person sees, when he is in a happy frame at secret prayer. Shut your eyes when ye come out; for all other objects are but vile and sordid, and not worth the glances of a noble soul. O the sweetness, the hidden manna, that the soul tastes when in lively communion with God! Part of that which is “laid up for” saints in glory,—let us a little relish our spirits with it. (Psalm xxxi. 19.)

1. Consider *what amorous agonies the soul delights to conflict with in secret.*—Fears that raise confidence, humility that exalts, tremblings that embolden, bright clouds that shine upon our Israelites in the night, and darkness that enlightens, solitudes full of heavenly company, and tears brimful of joy, and holy sighs like a cooling wind in harvest, sweats of love, and sick fits that are symptoms of health, and holy faintings that are the soul's cordials, a weariness to the flesh that is the healthful exercise of, and vigour to, the spirit, and a continual motion that never tires it. As Austin said of divine love, *Illo feror quocunque feror; pondus meum, amor meus*:† “It is the weight of my soul; it carries me up and down in all that I speak, and all that I act.”

2. *Its ecstasies and heavenly raptures.*‡—Which allure and draw the heart from earthly vanities; when the soul shuts its eyes to wordly delights, and says of laughter, with Solomon, “It is mad: and of mirth, What doeth it?” (Eccles. ii. 2;) cannot warm its thoughts at “the crackling of thorns under a pot,” nor be joyful in the house of fools. (Eccles. vii. 4, 6.) It is the soul's pleasure to loathe pleasure itself; none so beautiful to him as Christ, “the chiefest among ten thousand;” (Canticles v. 10;) no sweetness like that of the tree in the midst of the wood, “the tree of life in the midst of the Paradise of God;” he sits under it with great delight, while it drops sweeter than honey into his closet. (Canticles ii. 3; Rev. ii. 7; 1 Sam. xiv. 26.)

3. *Its admirable prophecies.*—Prayer stands upon Mount Zion with a divining, presaging spirit: it foretells great things to the church's joy and its enemies' terror. Elijah at prayer in Horeb receives answer of the ruin of the house of Ahab, and [is] bid to go and “anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi king over Israel.” (1 Kings xix. 16.) The two witnesses under the Romish defection “have power to smite the earth with plagues, as often as they will;” (Rev. xi. 6;) consonant to what Tertullian said

* Suetonius in *Vita Domitiani*, cap. 3. † GERSON, tom. ii. KK. 4. ‡ *Quæ major voluptas, quàm fastidium ipsius voluptatis?*—TERTULLIANUS. “What greater delight can there be than the very height of delight itself?”—EDIT.

of old: *Votum Christianorum confusio nationum*,* “The prayers of Christians confounded the nations.” And so it will shortly prove; the doom of Babylon comes out of the temple. When the sanctuary is full of the smoke of the incense of prayer, the seven angels come out with the seven last “vials full of the wrath of God,” to pour them out upon the anti-christian world. (Rev. xv. 7, 8; xvi. 1.) Prayer calculates and hastens the ruin of Rome. When the spirit of prayer is once poured out, it brings deliverance to mount Zion, and “gathers the nations into the valley of Jehoshaphat” unto judgment. (Joel ii. 21, 32; iii. 1, 2.) Let us never be discouraged: if prayer fail to work, and awaken Christ in the ship of the church, her storms will cease in a halcyon calm. (Luke viii. 24.)

4. *Its comforting evidences.*—Secret prayer duly managed is a notable evidence of adoption: “Pray to thy Father who is, and sees, in secret,” who “knows the secrets of thy heart,” thy “groanings are not hid from” him. (Psalm xlv. 21; xxxviii. 9.) None but a child of promise has this sweet freedom with God as a Father.

5. *Its rewards and revenues.*—Nothing revives and cheers the spirit so much as answers of love and mercy from heaven. As it feasts the conscience with the royal dainties of sincerity, so it sets a lustre upon every mercy, as being the child of prayer. Our closets influence upon our shops, our ships, our fields, and all we enjoy, that they smell of divine blessing: as David said of precepts, (Psalm cxix. 56,) the soul may say, “This I have, because I urged the promises.”

USE IV. *To pity the miserable blind world, that know not where true comfort, joy, and strength is to be found.* (Gen. xxvii. 28.)—That see no beauty in the ways of God, and feel no sweetness in communion with him; that find no pleasure in closets, but play-houses, which Tertullian called “the devil’s churches;” † that cry out, with Esau, they “have enough.” (Gen. xxxiii. 9.) Alas! what “enough” can be in the creature, unless of dunghills, rattles, and vanities? O, how ignorant of heavenly treasures, of that fountain of mercies, whereof prayer drinks and refreshes the spirit of a saint! that know not that blessed “enough” whereof Jacob speaks, that ocean of “all” things to be found in God! ‡ (Gen. xxxiii. 11.) Now Europe is in flames, and the ark in danger, he cares not though the one be burnt, and the other in ashes, so he be safe. But if his concerns catch fire, he knows not to repair but to Endor or Ekron. (1 Sam. xxviii. 7; 2 Kings i. 2.) Such have no acquaintance with, no help from, God, no interest in the Keeper of souls. The world is a deplorable hospital, the great lazaret-house of sick, lame, and impotent persons, as Gerson terms it, § that have no face nor heart to go to the Physician of souls.

But ah! most lamentable is the state of some prostitute wretches of our age, that are, I fear, almost incurably gone with spiritual ulcers in their lungs, and eating, putrid cancers in their tongues; that breathe nothing but venom, and openly spit-out their rotten atheistical jeers against the spirit of prayer, and make a mock at communion with God; that scoff at what God hath promised as one of the choicest tokens of

* *De Oratione.* † TERTULLIANUS *De Spectaculis*, cap. 25, 26. ‡ מִיְּכָלִי *Mihī omnia*. [“I have all things.”] § GERSON, tom. ii. 76, 6.

his love to the church, and symptoms of the glory of the latter times, (Zech. xii. 10; Joel ii. 28, 32; Rom. x. 13; John vii. 39,) when God will turn such Ishmaels into the desert, and their drunken songs shall expire in dreadful howlings; (Amos viii. 10; Job xxx. 31;) profaner than many Heathens, that in the primitive times had some reverence for Christian worship, though they persecuted. But those of this adulterous Romish age, like brute beasts, speak evil of what they are ignorant [of], and are in danger to “perish utterly in their own corruption.” (2 Peter ii. 12.) Pity such, if there be yet hope, and commend their condition to God’s mercy, and penitent sorrow; that they may weep here, where tears prick; not in hell, where they scald and burn, and swell that river of brimstone.*

In the mean time, O ye that fear the Lord, be diligent to observe and interpret messages after secret prayer; for the life and joy of a Christian is improved by it. God has declared himself graciously pleased with secret prayer, so as to send an angel, that glorious creature, to fly into Daniel’s chamber, and he “weary with flying,” he moved so swiftly, *הָעֵלֹךְ הָיָה בְּיָגוּל* *volans in lassitudine*, as the original text expresses it. (Dan. ix. 21.) What a high expression is this, that even angels are represented weary with hasty flights to bring saints their answers! and of what great account does the Lord esteem his praying people, that angels are expressed to be tired in bringing tidings of mercy!

USE v. *Meditate on the glory of heaven, where all our prayers shall be turned into praises.*—When every sigh below shall be an accent to the heavenly music above, and the fears of the valley shall be turned into orient gems in the diadem of glory. *Here* we groan under † wants and desires, empty within, and live on the craving hand; but *there* palms in the hand, white robes, and everlasting joys upon the heads and hearts of saints.

SERMON XV.

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HOW MAY THE DUTY OF DAILY FAMILY PRAYER BE BEST MANAGED
FOR THE SPIRITUAL BENEFIT OF EVERY ONE IN THE FAMILY?

But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.—Joshua xxiv. 15.

JOSHUA being old and stricken in age, and desirous, before his departure out of the world, solemnly to engage the people of Israel to adhere to God and his holy worship, gathered all their tribes to Shechem, called for the chief of them that were governors, and representatives of the

* GERSON, tom. ii. 49, K K. 3.

† The first edition commences the clause thus: “Here we live in wants,” &c. Other slight variations occur between it and the second.—
EDIT.