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Student Volunteer

PRAYER

AND

MISSIONS

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STUDENT VOLUNTEER SERIES No. 3

PRAYER
AND
MISSIONS

BY
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PRAYER AND MISSIONS.

Among the Jews there has been a saying, "He prays not at all in whose prayers there is no mention of the kingdom of God," but the veil which remaineth untaken away in the reading of the Old Testament has hung like a pall over the living experience of this truth as well. And Jewish blindness finds its parallel in the Church's neglect of the voice which for centuries has been pleading, largely in vain, "Pray ye the Lord of the harvest to thrust forth laborers into His harvest." Eighteen long centuries of waiting, during which His kingdom has not come, are alike the evidence and the result of the absence of expressed desire that the King and His kingdom should appear. Perhaps more so now than for years, and yet very little even to-day does the longing cry rise up "Thy Kingdom Come," not only as an inner advent to hearts in Christendom, but over all the world. If the work of missions were purely a human

enterprise, this neglect might be intelligible. But in a supernatural cause, resting on a supernatural charter, led on by an omnipotent Leader, with all His supernatural power pledged to its support on the conditions of consecration and prayer on the part of its human agents, a neglect of prayer is a denial of the Lord's leadership and a willful limitation of success. For in all the missionary work of God, to take no wider ground, if there be any wider ground, all success and guidance are consequent only upon prayer.

It was so in the history of the early Church, whose development for years was almost wholly a story of missionary progress, with every step christened and crowned by prayer. The first and the last recorded apostolic acts after the Ascension were prayers—the gathering in the upper chamber at Jerusalem, and John's cry from Patmos, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." The disciples did not first of all take up the pen to preserve the memories of that priceless Life, nor was the voice of the world's great

need that had brought that Life to earth strong enough to call away their thoughts. First of all they sought the Lord's feet in prayer, and in the still, Pentecostal hour the first mighty flood of missionary power rolled over the missionary band, manifesting its character, its meaning and its might in the converted thousands of that day. And not only did prayer secure the promised power, but it converted and equipped the workers in the mission cause. It was in the days that they all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, and after direct request for guidance that Matthias was chosen to fill the place of him who was guide to them that took Jesus. The seven deacons; Barnabas and Saul, after their separation to foreign service by the Holy Ghost; the elders chosen at the close of their first missionary journey—none of these ventured over the threshold of their work without the preparation of prayer. And it was in prayer that new departures were taken. Cornelius at Caesarea, and Simon Peter upon the house-top at

Joppa, caught in prayer the commands that opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. Prayer formally marked the inception of the first missionary tour, as it had brought the impulse of his life to the first great missionary, "And it came to pass that when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance * * and He said unto me, depart, for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles." And lastly it was to prayer that in time of need those early workers invariably resorted. Peter kneels down by the death-bed of Dorcas, when he would have the knowledge of the Gospel's power, already declared at the beautiful gate of the temple in Jerusalem, revealed at Joppa, by a manifest resurrection from the dead. Prayer, made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him, opens Herod's dungeon doors and sets the apostle free. The Philippian prison shakes, the doors hang ajar, the prisoners' bonds burst asunder amid the midnight prayers of Silas and Paul. And on the last page of the record, Publius'

father's bloody flux departs in prayer. With everything thus begun, continued and ended in prayer; marking every emergency, guiding every progressive step, animating every act of wider obedience, is it any wonder that when the flames of missionary zeal and success sank away, it was because the fires of prayer had died low on the altars of devotion? Is there any other reason than this for the reiterated plea in the epistles of Paul, that the churches he had founded would labor together with him in prayer for the prosperity of the Gospel with them and with him and in all the world? No. The first two things in the early Church were prayer and missions, and the deepest alliance in the early Church was between missions and prayer.

And not only so, but whenever in subsequent centuries the Church has caught something of the spirit of those early days it has been manifested in a new devotion to missions and a revival of prayer. It must necessarily be so, for His spirit is a spirit of service and

communion, of missions and prayer. And communion without service is a dream, and service without communion, ashes. It is only, therefore, in accordance with a very general truth that we trace the foundation of our present missionary organizations to times of revival, which were also times of awakened prayer. Almost the first breathings of the modern missionary period were in 1723, when Robert Millar, Presbyterian minister in Paisley, published "The History of the Propagation of Christianity and the Overthrow of Paganism," in which he powerfully urged prayer as the first of nine means for "the conversion of the heathen world." In October, 1744, after some of the famous revivals of 1742, in the West country, a band of nineteen united in what they called, "a concert to promote more abundant application to a duty that is perpetually binding—prayer that our God's kingdom may come, joined with praises." In 1784, at a periodical meeting of the Northamptonshire Association of Baptist Ministers, on motion of John

Sutcliff, a plan drawn up by John Ryland, Jr., was addressed to the churches; which urged, among, other things, "Let the whole interest of the Redeemer be affectionately remembered, and the spread of the gospel to the most distant parts of the habitable globe, be the object of your most fervent requests." On this occasion Andrew Fuller preached his first printed sermon on "Working by Faith." Two years afterwards William Carey was baptized in the Nen by the same John Ryland, and ordained by Andrew Fuller to the ministry at Moulton village. It was out of all this prayer and revival that Carey and his little band of Baptist ministers addressed themselves to the task of evangelizing the world. Further still, the London Missionary Society was founded in 1795, for non-Baptist churches, as the direct result of William Carey's work, itself also conceived by Dr. Bogue and Mr. Stephens and founded in prayer. Long before this, even in 1732, as the result of four years' prayer, the first Moravian missionaries

went out from Herrnhut. And lastly, in 1806, a year full of missionary impulse in answer to prayer, came the famous prayer-meeting in the shadow of Greylock, of which Dr. Griffin, a president of Williams College, said: "I have been in situations to know that from the councils formed in that sacred conclave or from the mind of Mills himself, arose the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, the American Bible Society, and the African School, under the care of the Synod of New York and New Jersey, besides all the impetus given to domestic missions, to the Colonization Society, and to the general cause of benevolence in both hemispheres."

And not only has prayer played the supreme part in the formation of missionary agencies, but it has been at the bottom of all revivals in missionary work. The upheaval in the Training School at Kyoto, Japan, March 16, 1883, whose influence has, perhaps, shaped the whole subsequent Christian development of Japan, the outpoured floods

in the Lone Star Mission among the Telegus, the movement among the Mahrattas in India on the first Monday in January, 1833, the incidents of 1846 in Miss Fiske's school at Oroomiah, the work of Michaelis of the Gossner Society in Java, and the revival wave that swept over Turkey two years ago—all these had no sufficient explanation save that supplied by the power of definite and believing prayer.

Aye, and we may go a step further than this, and assert that through men who knew how to pray has every new departure and development of missions, which has borne in any real sense the marks of God's leading, been effected. First of all, the occupation of new fields. It was the potency of prayer that demolished to dust the walls of Chinese seclusion. The beginning of the great work in Japan was traced to a little room where the missionaries met every day to pray. In 1770, seven years after the death of Frederick Bohmisch, the first of the missionary triumvirate which had gone to Greenland to uphold the

hands of Egede, John Beck wrote to Matthew Stach, recalling the history of their early life's work. "We three it was," he says, "who made that solemn vow, one with another, wholly to follow our Lord in this land. How many times we besought Him, with weeping, to grant us one soul of this nation. But He stopped not at one. These congregations which we have seen grow up from the beginning, how far do they exceed all our early prayers." Allen Gardiner transfigured the initial steps of the work in Terra del Fuego with prayer. There is a paper written by him on his birthday, in which he says: "I pray that Thou wouldst graciously prepare a way for the entrance of Thy servants among the poor heathen of these islands, * * * and should we even languish and die here, I beseech Thee to raise up others and to send forth laborers into this harvest." The translations of the Bible, which have gone on their errand under His blessing, have been made by men who knew how, to borrow Neesima's phrase, to advance

upon their knees. Of course it has ever been through prayer that the missionaries have been secured, and it was thither, consequently, that Bishop Patteson resorted when he set apart George Sarawia, praying that "he might be but the first of a goodly band of Melanesian clergymen to carry the gospel to their people." This was the only source of missionary supply recognized by Christ—"Pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest to thrust forth laborers into His harvest." And seeking them in any way which neglects the unceasing search of prayer is not the Lord's way. The first woman ever sent from America as a medical missionary declared her departure for the lightless lands to be the result of her early pastor's prayers. The day appointed by the Church Missionary Society in 1885 to pray for workers was anticipated, even the evening before the formal meeting, by one hundred graduates of the University Church, who dedicated themselves to the foreign missionary work, and declared themselves ready to go

when their studies were completed. Before they called He answered, and while they were yet speaking He heard. God alone knows how, replying to prayer, He sent out the hundred workers asked by the China Inland Mission in 1887. David Temple and William Goodell went out to the foreign field from a little group of half a dozen who met for prayer around an old tree stump at Andover, eighty years ago. And if a clearer indication than these is needed of God's way of leading out His workers, it is found in the words of Paton's parents to their son as he was deciding the question of his duty to the heathen, "When you were given to us, we laid you upon the altar, our first born, to be consecrated, if God saw fit, as a missionary of the cross; and it has been our constant prayer that you may be prepared, qualified and led to this very decision." If the Church must resort chiefly to prayer for the missionary workers, workers and Church must labor together in prayer for the desired conversions; and foreign work as a rule has been least fruitful in

such results where the Church has least lavished her prayers. Only the great cloud of witnesses who have been familiar with all the trials of God's missionaries from the day Paul was cast out for dead at Lystra to the sufferings caused by the last Chinese riots, know how many lives have been saved; how many dangers have been avoided, how many perils passed on the highway of prayer. The deliverances of 1839 in the Turkish Empire, and the preservation of faith among the fagots and flames of persecution at Uganda, were alike advantages brought to the kingdom of God by prayer. There is no other way than this to fill the treasuries of mission boards and supply the means for an immensely widened work in the foreign field. Nor is this merely a Christian truth which no experience has ever proved. Pastor Gossner sent out into the foreign field 144 missionaries. Besides providing outfit and passage, he had never less than twenty missionaries dependent directly upon him for support. How he carried on this and his other Christian

work, a sentence from the funeral address read over his grave will explain: "He prayed up the walls of a hospital and the hearts of the nurses; he prayed mission stations into being and missionaries into faith; he prayed open the hearts of the rich, and gold from the most distant lands." "When I sent you without purse and scrip and shoes, lacked ye anything? And they said, Nothing." It is the voice of Him to whom belong the silver and the gold, and the cattle on a thousand hills.

Another step in this connection we are tracing needs to be taken. The first thing in the life of the convert must be prayer. The mission that is not a training school of prayer may accomplish much in civilizing and enlightening, but it will be little of a spiritual power in its land. Nothing but the intimacy of communion and the answering strength involved in taking tuition under Him who is to teach men to pray, will ever hold the missionary convert in the midst of overwhelming temptations, or make him for God a man of spiritual power.

Things were only, then, as in God's way they must be, when in the revivals of 1872, in Japan, students in the schools of Japan, and in the colleges of prayer, so besought God with tears in one of the meetings at Yokohama, that He would pour out His spirit on Japan as at Pentecost, that captains of men-of-war, English and American, who were present, remarked, "The prayers of these Japanese take the hearts out of us," and the first Japanese congregation of eleven converts sprang out of those prayers; or when the prime minister of the bloody queen of Madagascar, endeavoring to enforce her terrible edicts against the Christians, was confronted by his own nephew's declaration, "I am a Christian, and if you will you may put me to death, for I must pray." Even more clearly than here can this alliance of prayer and missions be traced in the lives of individual missionaries. It may not be possible to judge of outward success; it is possible to know the measure of inward fidelity from the place which prayer occupies in the missionary's

life, and yet, "I do desire to say, gravely and earnestly," says a missionary of the American Board: "that my missionary life has been successful so far as I have been prayerful, and non-successful so far as in prayerfulness I have been lax." Foremost among these prayer-souled men of missions stands David Brainerd. In his diary he writes: "God enabled me so to agonize in prayer that I was quite wet with perspiration, though in the shade and in the cool wind. My soul was drawn out very much from the world for multitudes of souls." And in 1747 he left a dying injunction for his beloved Christian Indians, that at the monthly missionary concert, which the year before had been recommended from Scotland, they should pray for "the conversion of the world." Such a man was John Hunt, with his death-bed cry: "Oh, let me pray for Fiji, Lord, save Fiji;" and Adoniram Judson, whose only testimony, after a long life of deep experience was: "I never was deeply interested in any object, I never prayed sincerely and earnestly for

anything but it came at some time—no matter how distant the day, somehow, in some shape, probably the last I should have devised—it came!” Dr. Goodell’s appeal, “Let it be known, too, that more, apparently, can be done now by prayer than in any other way. Whoever prays most, helps most,” was only an expression of his own life. It was by prayer that Paton was led into the missionary service, by prayer he won the hearts of degraded men, by prayer he dug wells and found fresh water where others found none or salt, by prayer he checked the hand of the assassin, by prayer he locked the jaws of violence; we may be sure that it will be in the hush of prayer that he will fall asleep. From no other source than this could Mackay ever have gained strength for the life of unwearied, unmeasured usefulness he laid down at Uganda. Regarding his prayer, his companion, Ashe, says: “Mackay’s prayer was very childlike, full of simple trust and supplication. Very humble, very meek, very childlike, he was on his

knees before God." How much David Livingstone prayed may be inferred from brief glimpses here and there in his journals, into the holy place in his life. He records on April 29, 1866, an answer to some prayers of his for influence on the minds of the heathen. He began different years of his diaries with a prayer. Thus, Jan. 1, 1868, "Almighty Father, forgive the sins of the past year for thy Son's sake. Help me to be more profitable during this year. If I am to die this year, prepare me for it." He wrote prayers on his birthdays, too, as March 19, 1872, the next to the last of his birthdays, "My Jesus, my King, my Life, my All, I again dedicate my whole self to thee. Accept me and grant, oh, gracious Father, that ere this year is gone, I may finish my task. In Jesus' name, I ask it. Amen. So let it be. David Livingstone." And on the last birthday of all, "Let not Satan prevail over me, oh! my good Lord Jesus." And when the worn and wasted figure was found dead, it was in the attitude of prayer. Even in that lonely hour he

had knelt down by his bedside at Ilala to commend, with one dying effort, the world's open sore to the Redeemer of the oppressed and the Savior of the lost. There are more martyrs than those who have poured out their blood or burned at the stake for Christ and His Church. They too, are martyrs who have poured out their lives in service and their souls in the agony of prayer, that the Son of God and His kingdom would come. And as Sabbath by Sabbath a great branch of the Church sings those glorious words, "The noble army of martyrs, praise Thee," it is simply the confident assertion that those who served Him here in the ministry of toil and prayer have taken up the ministry of praise in the land where His servants shall serve Him.

The connection between prayer and missions has been traced thus over the whole field of missionary conditions, simply to show that every element in the missionary problem of to-day depends for its solution chiefly upon prayer. The assertion has been

frequently made in past years, that with 20,000 men, properly qualified and distributed, the world could be evangelized in thirty years. And actually there is need of an immediate undaunted effort to secure 20,000 men. Neither, perhaps, can the world be evangelized without them, nor can they be secured without effort. But it is hopeless to endeavor to obtain them, and they will be worthless if obtained, unless the whole effort be inspired and permeated with prayer. "Thrust Thou forth Thy laborers into the harvest." Or with the world open and men offering, and treasures depleted, the missionary agents of the Church may sometimes feel that the great need is a consecration of wealth to the world-wide service of Christ; and surely he does still plead that the tithes be brought into the store-house and His readiness to pour out a blessing tested therewith, but money is not the great need. The evangelization of the world in this generation depends first of all upon a revival of prayer. Deeper than the need for men; deeper, far, than the

need for money; aye, deep down at the bottom of our spiritless life is the need for the forgotten secret of prevailing, world-wide prayer. Missions have progressed slowly abroad, because piety and prayer have been shallow at home. "When I shall see Christians all over the world," said John Foster, "resolved to prove what shall be the efficacy of prayer for the conversion of the world, I shall begin to think that the millennium is at the door." The condition and consequence of such prayers as this is a new out-pouring of the Holy Ghost. Nothing short of His own suggestion will prompt the necessary prayer to bring Him back again in power. Nothing short of His new out-pouring will ever solve the missionary problems of our day. The first call ever sent out for the annual week of prayer, came first from the mission field, and was designed to unite the whole Christian world in earnest prayer for the promised outpouring of the Spirit upon all nations; and yet year by year the idea has been practically ignored, so that on one occasion the

advance call contained no allusion to the Holy Spirit at all. There has been in our own day more than one unconscious manifestation of the same spirit which more than a century and a half ago, when the King of Denmark issued a letter ordering a petition for missions in India and Denmark to be introduced into the church prayers, quickly found expression in hostility and disobedience.

Considering the fearful consequences of it all, something like criminal negligence has marked for years the attitude of the Church toward the matchless power of prayer for the world. Shall it be so longer or shall a change come over the Church? It will not avail to pass resolutions and form prayer alliances. For generations great calls have been issued, leagues have been proposed, emotions have been aroused, and yet the days continue evil; the kingdom of God moves faster, but slowly sti¹¹ and prayer is an echo on men's lips rather than a passion from their hearts. But if fifty men of our generation will enter the holy place of prayer, and become,

henceforth, men whose hearts God has touched, with the prayer-passion, the history of His Church will be changed.

By the wicked neglect of a life that misses the first things in prayer, and that never strains the heart strings of its devotion over the world, shall we virtually beseech Him: "Let not Thy kingdom come; stop Thou the Macedonian cry; close Thou the doors of access to the heathen; bind up the purse strings of the Church and palsy the feet of missionaries upon the threshold; let the world's millions go on to death." Or, in lives that linger ceaselessly before the Lord, shall we pour out our souls in John Milton's sublime prayer: "The times and seasons pass along under Thy feet and go and come at Thy bidding; and as thou didst dignify our fathers' days with many revelations above all their foregoing ages since Thou tookest the flesh, so Thou canst vouchsafe to us, the unworthy, as large a portion of Thy Spirit as Thou pleasest; for who shall prejudice thy all-governing will? Seeing the power of Thy grace is not passed

away with the primitive times, as bold and faithless men imagine, but Thy kingdom is now at hand, and Thou, standing at the door, come forth out of Thy royal chambers, O Prince of all the kings of the earth, put on the visible robes of Thy imperial majesty; take up that unlimited sceptre which Thy Almighty Father hath bequeathed Thee; for now the voice of Thy Bride calls Thee, and all creatures sigh to be renewed." Of far greater service than any array of learning or gifts of eloquence, more to be desired than gold and fine gold, more to be sought than a great name, or apparent opportunities for large usefulness, of deeper significance than high intellectual attainment, or power of popular influence, is this gift—may God give it to each one of us!—the secret and sweetness of unceasing, prevailing, triumphant prayer for the coming of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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