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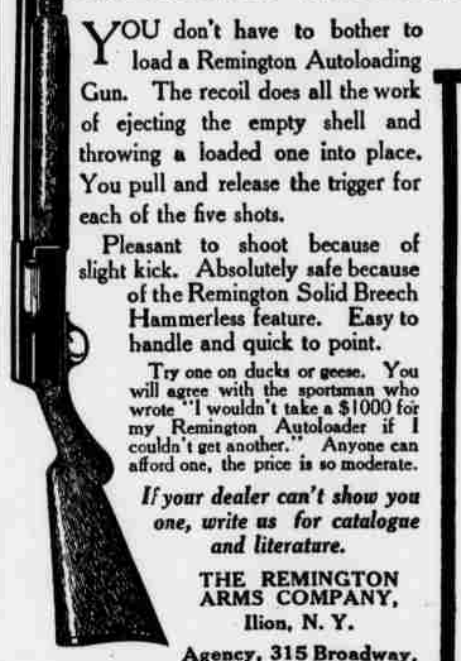
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## REASONABLENESS OF PRAYER

### Is There Conflict Between Religion and Reason?

THE reasonableness of prayer", was the subject of Rev. T. A. Cheatham's Sunday morning sermon at the Village Chapel service, an effort to determine whether there is after all any conflict between *Religion and Reason*. The text: Job XXI. 15: "what is the Almighty that we should serve Him? And what profit should we have if we pray unto Him?" and St. James v. 16: "The effectual, fervent, prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

Mr. Cheatham said: There are some subjects that many of us feel "sermon saturated" with, we feel that they have been preached about and talked about until the field has become barren and anything that might be said would be trite. This might possibly be said of Prayer but we feel that there are some things that should be said for the sake of those who have been confused by a sort of skepticism that claims that Christians accept many things on a kind of blind faith, without understanding them and so *violate* their reason.

Certainly some of the Christian truths are accepted on faith, and some of them we cannot even explain, but we deny that any of them are *contrary* to reason. We receive the benefits of electricity, we cannot explain its mystery but surely by using it we do not violate its laws. It is impossible for us to understand just how the little shrub grows up into the tree and bears the luscious fruit but surely we do not refuse the apple because we are unable to reason out how it grew. And the fact that we accept and eat the apple does not mean that we have violated the law of its growth. But we find men who approach Christianity from the outside and because they cannot reason out every thing that they think Christianity stands for, they say, "I cannot accept it" "it is unreasonable," surely, until we can explain the blade of grass, until we can explain how the acorn becomes the great tree, until we can explain our own little existence, let us not say that it is *unreasonable* that we cannot explain the great God.

The two verses of our text introduce the great question of prayer and the Christian answer to it.

Many honest Christians would confess if they properly questioned, that the least satisfactory part of their religious life has to do with prayer.

The life of service is full of attraction and meditation is helpful but with prayer, the confession must be made that to a great many it brings no joy.

We have a certain heathen country in mind where the custom is to write out the prayer on a piece of parchment, after which the parchment is wrapped around a cylinder and the cylinder is attached to a windmill or a water wheel and they account that with every revolution of the cylinder the prayer is presented at the courts of heaven.

How often our prayers are merely the accompaniment of our daily dressing and undressing, down we kneel, and repeat the familiar phrases and get up and our prayers are ended. So conventional habitual that we might say it was mechanical and automatic. There is just about the same amount of religion in the act as in the daily dressing or eating, and naturally we feel that we do not believe very much in prayer.

The practical question then suggests itself, if we as business men put the same amount of interest and time into our business that we put into our religion, what would become of our business? The man who "plays at" religion or who tries to buy his freedom of conscience ought not to expect very much satisfaction. Would any one believe from our interest in our prayers that we really *believed* in prayer as one of the great foundation principles upon which the whole Christian structure rests?

We claim to believe the words of our text. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" this is a strong declaration but the original is stronger.

"The fervent prayer of a righteous man prevaleth mightily in its working—literally, in its *energizing*, its power to effect results, and one would believe from this that prayer is itself really one of the great forces of the universe.

Now there are many of us who believe that prayer has a certain sort of soothing effect upon ourselves, that it exercises a sort of power of suggestion and tends to quiet our nerves, and that it is really helpful from *our own* stand point, but that it is powerless to effect any sort of a change in what is really to be. Such persons would love to believe in prayer but they cannot get beyond the influence of that view that "what is to be will be" which would logically make man hold his hands and wait for it all to happen.

And so the objection comes, "this world of nature is a world of law, all things go on in natural order and this natural order is fixed and invariable—God could not interfere with it to answer our prayers without violating the laws which He has Himself imposed on nature," as if God had created the world like a great clock and had set it going and were now afraid to touch it lest he should get his fingers in the mechanism and stop it.

Then the objection in again urged, "God is unchangeable and our prayers could not effect a change in things."

And the answer is—"God is indeed unchangeable as far as His moral nature is concerned, He cannot be just today and unjust tomorrow but this does not mean that He is not free to will and act.

Surely we cannot say that the laws of nature cannot be used and adapted to man's needs, else what is our very civilization. Nor are these triumphs of man limited only to the control of natural facts and forces as he finds them, he can even improve on nature's own work. See

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