The Spectator.

Letters to the Editor.

The Efficacy of Prayer.

My object in writing now is to endeavour to confine the discussion to what I conceive to be strategic points, though they are commonly neglected, and are usually, but indirectly, aimed at by your numerous correspondents. Those who deny the right of appeal to statistical inquiries upon the efficacy of prayer assume implicitly two propositions, both of which I gainsay, and which I will now explicitly state. They assert, first, that the desire to pray is intuitive to man (let the word pass, for the moment); secondly, that the cogency of intuition is greater than that of observation. As regards the meaning I assign in this letter to "intuitive perceptions," I am perfectly willing to accept the widest definition my adversaries can reasonably desire. I do not wish to haggle about narrowing the limit; it is in no way necessary to my argument that I should do so, therefore I will concede that these perceptions are so essentially and habitually connected in the human mind with the act of prayer that they naturally and imperatively follow it, and that they are among the mental habits which the child acquires when he is taught to pray. My second point is easily disposed of, namely, that even if some of these feelings, and he is certainly in earnest, therefore the missionary's habit of the child resembles in many respects that of the missionary. 

My second point is easily disposed of, namely, that even if the belief in prayer were intuitive, its cogency ought to be considered inferior to that which is prompted by the observation of facts. My argument is this,—I do not care to go into the metaphysics of the matter, but would simply point out that the very theologians who insist on the supreme authority of religious intuition are precisely the men who have already most prominently denied it in practice. Their predecessors, at the time of the Christian era, and for hundreds of years subsequently, nay, even men of the present time in Catholic countries, have believed in the divine origin of dreams, in oracles, in ordeal and in duel, in lots after prayer, in blessings and in cursings, in witchcraft, in miraculous cures, in demoniacal possessions and in exorcisms. All this the theologians of the present English Church have quietly and with universal acquiescence allowed to pass, and yet they start with no less indignation, as at a previously unheard-of and most unreasonable interference. You will observe that the views advanced in this letter could be much more strongly enforced by an elaborate essay, but "apocryphal verbum sat," and I write cosily, at the risk of weakening my case, in order to induce those who may answer me in your columns to be equally concise and pointed.

I am, Sir, &c.,

Francis Galton.

A Prophecy.

On the efficacy of prayer, and to statistical inquiries upon the efficacy of prayer assume implicitly two propositions, both of which I gainsay, and which I will now explicitly state. They assert, first, that the desire to pray is intuitive to man (let the word pass, for the moment); secondly, that the cogency of intuition is greater than that of observation. As regards the meaning I assign in this letter to "intuitive perceptions," I am perfectly willing to accept the widest definition my adversaries can reasonably desire. I do not wish to haggle about narrowing the limit; it is in no way necessary to my argument that I should do so, therefore I will concede that these perceptions are so essentially and habitually connected in the human mind with the act of prayer that they naturally and imperatively follow it, and that they are among the mental habits which the child acquires when he is taught to pray. My second point is easily disposed of, namely, that even if some of these feelings, and he is certainly in earnest, therefore the missionary's habit of the child resembles in many respects that of the missionary.

In modern civilisation the action of the mother upon the belief and habit of the child resembles in many respects that of the missionary upon those of the savage. She tells him loving tales about foes; also that the class of similar feelings which are such as obedience to dreams, incantations, and witchcraft, fear of the evil eye, belief in demoniacal possession, exorcising, coercion developed in the average man may be reckoned as intuitive to a man. If we do not find these, it is because we have no experience, whether it be of one man or a hundred millions of men, will ever supply them. —S. II.