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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

### THE EFFICACY OF PRAYER.

(TO THE EDITOR OF THE "SPECTATOR.")

SIR.—I thank you for having opened your columns to discussion upon the efficacy of Prayer, and to have so well acted as moderator in a matter which deeply touches the feelings of many men as to have enabled the discussion to be carried on with mutual forbearance and respect on the part of the disputants.

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 gausay, 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 of observation. I maintain, on the other hand, that the desire to pray is not intuitive, and even if it were, that the cogency of intuition is less 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 enormously, and will allow that all perceptions or feelings strongly developed in the average man may be reckoned as intuitive to the human race. Now I assert that the desire for prayer is not one of these feelings, but that it is an artificial creation of theologians; also that the class of similar feelings which are intuitives are such as obedience to dreams, incantations, and witchcraft, fear of the evil eye, belief in demoniacal possession, exorcising, coercion of an angry spirit by some tom-tom ceremony, fetish-worship, and tabu. The savage does not pray by natural inclination, but the missionary teaches him to pray, and as, at the same time, he preaches to him on the existence of a God who listens to prayer, precept to pray is a logical sequence of that instruction. The savage believes in what the missionary tells him, because the missionary is avowedly a more instructed man, than himself in many things, and he is certainly in earnest; therefore the missionary's duty is accepted by the savage, and the converted heathen is taught to pray.

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 God's watchful care, and of His answers to those who kneel and speak to Him, and she joins his little hands together, and sets him on his knees, and teaches him, with caressing earnestness, to pray for temporal blessings, from the very dawn of his intelligence. What wonder that this nursery theology should pervade his life, and that it should be so associated with his deepest feelings that he should at last believe it to have been intuitive? His belief is confirmed by the events of his after life, for on all his solemn occasions it is the habit for the clergyman to step in, and to consecrate them by prayer. He is present by the death-bed, by the marriage altar, and by the baptismal font; he usually superintends early instruction; and he has by custom the opportunity and unrestrained right of preaching and praying before large congregations on every seventh day. Again, I ask, what wonder is it that a habit of prayer, and a sense of its necessity should be formed which seem, until their sources have been analysed, to be of primeval origin?

... 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 and auguries, in oracles and in dual, or lots after prayer, in blessings and in curings, in witchcraft, in miraculous cures, in demoniacal possessions and in exorcisms. All this the theologians of the present English Church have quietly suppressed as of "superstitious" origin. They also complacently ignore that their predecessors have been beaten along their whole line by statistical inquiries, for it is by more or less unconscious use of statistics that the belief in oracles, dual, augury, and the rest, has disappeared, and now that theologians are summoned on statistical grounds to surrender a belief which I have shown to have much less claim to be considered as intuitive, they start with native 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 "sapienti verbum est," and I write concisely, 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.,

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In October, 1831, the sea made a breach in the road which passes through the province from north to south where it is nine miles from high-water mark. All having life, human beings, cattle, wild beasts, &c., were drowned, and left in heaps eight and ten feet high against the road. This was north of Balasore. South of Balasore, when examining the country, I stood under a tree with the only survivor in a village containing seven or eight hundred inhabitants. Late in the evening said the survivor of 1831, the wind was very strong on shore and the tide rising. Several of the inhabitants went down to the beach. Those who had witnessed the storm of 1823 proposed to go inland; the younger ones would not believe that the sea could harm them, and voted for remaining. All were drowned except my informant, who was up in the tree under which we were standing, and twice the sea went over him. When he came down all was dry, but, as he expressed it, not a cat left.

When I was last in Orissa, in 1853, after twenty-two years, I found many parts in which not a being had been left in 1831 again densely populated. When I searched in the record-room at Balasore for the map I had made of the country inundated from the Subenreeks river to the Dunrah river, it could not be found, and nobody had ever seen it or heard of it. And now, after forty years, a chapter on the calamities of Orissa ignores altogether the hurricanes of 1831 and 1832, and I dare say those who inhabit the country between the high road and the sea have no idea that the wave passed over the village sixteen or eighteen feet deep. When old Toolsee Dass tells of how he was carried on the top of a choppab (thatched roof) eight miles inland, and when daylight broke found himself high and dry on the Cuttack road, the sea again quite out of sight and he alone alive amidst heaps of men, women, children, goats, buffaloes, and wild beasts, they look upon him as an old *Shoot-wallah*, (liar) and have entire faith in the future good behaviour of the storm-wave.

But it will come again. Evidently it was very near last month. The papers say,—"The station of Balasore, once one of the

ness as that by which we have "cognizance" of the properties of matter. We must admit direct cognizance of the one as of the other, or we must refuse it to both. For both are only known as in experience from the impressions produced on us by external bodies or the impressions we produce upon them. And if Dr. Carpenter resolves the properties of matter and the observed laws regulating them to human conceptions—of the individual of the case, it matters not which—he is not entitled to put force in another category, and claim for the judgment of cause and effect any higher validity or any wider scope. There may be, and we hold there are, perfectly valid grounds for affirming the necessity and universality of the law of cause and effect as a law of things as well as of thought. But it is the former because it is the latter. We must seek in thought itself for the grounds of its own necessity. If we do not find them there, it is certain no experience, whether it be of one man or a hundred millions of men, will ever supply them.—S. H.

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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 and auguries, 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 appropriated, as of "superstitious" origin. They also complacently ignore that their predecessors have been beaten along their whole life by statistical inquiries, for it is by more or less unconscious use of statistics that the belief in ordeal, duel, augury, and the rest, has disappeared, and now that theologians are summoned on statistical grounds to surrender a belief which I have shown to have much less claim to be considered as intuitive, they start with *notes* 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 "sapienti verbum sat," and I write concisely, 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.,

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