

“WOMEN MUST WEEP.”

BY CHARLOTTE M. MASON.

NEVER were we more aware of the “tears in things” than during these days of the war. Our sorrow is not always or necessarily selfish; those of us who, interned in Germany in September last year, saw train load after train load (every half hour) of splendid young Germans, hurrying to the front to be hurled as a battering ram against impregnable fortresses, felt the pity of it almost as much as if these had been our own men going to the front in our own cause. We seldom see the grave faces of a group in khaki without being aware of the opening of a sorrowful vista, and, if one of the men be disabled—?

Perhaps no one has escaped the writing of those notes of condolence, hard to write, because we cannot say what we feel and words are futile. We are indeed under a heavy cloud; most people have “someone at the front”; yet those whose very near and dear are always exposed to sudden death, go about cheerful; “that we may cheerfully perform those things which Thou wouldst have us to do,” would seem to have become our national supplication; the men in the trenches are of good cheer, cockney wit and country humour play freely on things “frightful.” We do not, at home or abroad, require to stimulate our courage or strengthen our fortitude with diurnal doses of HATE. We wonder indeed what keeps us going in the face of appalling calamity; is it that other countries—Belgium, Serbia, France, Russia—are more distressed than we? Hardly, because we do not institute comparisons before we arrive at our mood; also, because the same high cheer prevails in these more distressful countries. It would appear that there is

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a sort of resilience in human nature which calamity sets free. We are more than we know; the spirit is greater than the flesh, and we begin to comprehend that, from the Divine point of view, the war with all its horrors may not be too great a price to pay for the liberation of the spiritual forces in men, tied and bound as these have been by the chains of luxurious custom and materialistic thought.

We are prepared to wish each other and to take to ourselves “a happy Christmas,” feeling that we in our small way are bearing the Cross of Christ and walking in His fellowship; also, that, as little children, we are being led from hour to hour; we are hardly aware of personal claims and desires and only want “to do our bit.” In that respect, our men at the front are better off than the women they have left; notwithstanding the constant peril of death they live in, they have the satisfaction of *knowing* what to do; they are relieved of the distressing effort of decision; theirs but to do or die with a single mind.

Women must weep, it is true; but there are alleviations. It is not a comfort to know that many mothers, sisters, wives, are in like case; but perhaps the poignancy of sorrow is a little relieved by the outgoing of sympathy with those others; it is good, too, to know that God is dealing with the world; our own aggressive individuality is in abeyance, and we believe that our men fight or fall under the leadership of the Captain of our Salvation. We dare not picture to ourselves the horrors of the war, and perhaps we need not do so; there are two chief alleviations for our distress, a lesser and a greater. The almost miraculous perfection to which surgery has been brought within the last few decades is a comfortable reflection for those who know that their dearest may be at any moment exposed to frightful injury—this is the lesser alleviation: the greater is a quite new realisation of the Communion of Saints. The barriers that

separate us from the spiritual world appear to have fallen suddenly, like those walls of Jericho, and we find that the life everlasting is immediate, near, no way separated from the life that now is, save by that screen of flesh which is, alas, so easily and instantly removed. We, too, enter into the spiritual life and are one with those we have lost.

There is, too, the comfort of sympathy received; that sincere and poignant fellow feeling, of which we are so rarely capable, now goes out freely to the anxious and the bereaved. The comfort of service ranks high in the scale of our alleviations, and
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there are few women who have not discovered some mode of service; we are all “emulously rapid in the race” whose goal is, to be of use. We are, in a word, living in the rarified air of high places; breathing is difficult, no doubt, but how stimulating is the atmosphere, how inspiring the prospect!

There is one profound alleviation which I have not yet touched upon, but to say a few feeble and ignorant words about which is the object of this paper. I speak of the steady support, the exquisite consolation, afforded by prayer. “When I am in trouble I will call upon God, and when my heart is vexed within me I will complain,” is the cry of everyone, and I have no new thing to say about the incessant supplications to “the God who heareth prayer” which rise up day and night in strong accord from those who have given pledges to their country and from those who have nothing to give but their prayers; perhaps it may be that these prayers fall again upon the land in that strange peace of God which is able to keep our hearts even in seasons of war and conflict.

But we are sometimes a little troubled with the feeling that we know not what to pray for as we ought; that perhaps we are selfish in praying so much for our own, or insincere in offering supplications for others when all our love and our thoughts go to those who belong to us. Then we ask, Is it right to pray for victory? Is it right to pray for the dead? Not even our closet with closed doors—that closet we keep in our hearts—is secluded from perplexity and distress.

I venture to think that the Lord’s Prayer reveals its sovereign virtue in times of perplexity and distress. We pray as those who have received authorization; there is no question as to whether our approach to God is rightly ordered, or whether we pray for those things we ought to pray for; and the sense that we are doing the appointed thing gives us a right of entry, as it were, to the Divine audience chamber. Then, how wonderfully and surprisingly the Prayer orders our desires, gives us a sense of proportion, teaches us to put the first things foremost in a way we should think insincere if the ordering of the petitions were our own, but which is the one means of allaying the restless hurrying to and fro of our thoughts and desires. Our experience is expressed in the words of Trench’s fine sonnet:—

“Lord, what a change within us one short hour
Spent in Thy presence can prevail to make.”

Long ago, Frederick Denison Maurice pointed out that the first
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word of the Prayer is the most difficult and the most essential. Once we can pray “Our” comprehensively, and with “faith, affectionate and free,” we are wafted into heavenly courts

where prayer becomes our native speech, and we know that the answer to our prayers travels towards us from the moment the words are conceived in our hearts.

If the comprehensiveness of “our” gives ease to hearts overburdened by all the woes of all the world, what can we say of the repose of trust and tenderness, of the reverence and confidence, of the consciousness of a child’s rights and a child’s assurance, that come with the invocation “Father”? Comforted and enlarged by the two thoughts of universal brotherhood and universal Fatherhood, we are able to escape from the bonds of the self that circumscribes us, and to feel that as loving and dutiful children, our first concern is for the things that belong to our Father’s honour, for indeed His glory includes our happiness; and our next concern is for the well-being of the brotherhood, for that includes our own and that of all whom we love. Having *prayed* these two words only, our souls are in quiet resting places and we are at leisure to spread abroad our affections and to send heavenward our aspirations.

Probably the praying of the Lord’s Prayer should be a leisurely office, to which we should give our first waking *hour*: it can hardly be accomplished in less, and it is only as we unfold our desires at length in our closet that we are able to sum them up in a rapid survey when we repeat the same prayer during the church services.

“*Our Father,*” we pray, regard, we beseech Thee, with Thy Fatherly tenderness and loving kindness our men, our soldiers and sailors,—and we let our imagination glance for a moment over trench, field, camp and hospital, sea and land, east and west: on those in command, and especially ____; on the men of our allies, especially ____; on the enemy (?), on doctors, nurses and chaplains serving with the forces; on the families and friends of our men, on the working men at home; on the King and his Council and on those of our Allies; on our own families and households, especially ____; on our friends and fellow workers; on all who are suffering and sorrowing, especially ____; and so on, until we have taken into the range of our prayer all who immediately or more remotely concern us at the present time, remembering that it is for all of these that we are about to

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pray the Lord’s Prayer, and that each separate petition begins with “Our Father.”

“*Which art in heaven*”—“Grant that we (all) may in heart and mind thither ascend and with Thee continually dwell.”

And now we come to the first petition, and that implies that we have thought, and have schooled ourselves into meekness; for what is our natural first cry? Is it not “Give”—relief or health, protection or prosperity, or whatever we or ours are most urgently in need of? The loving and dutiful child asks for the things he longs for, it is true, but his first thoughts are outgoings of love; to be with his Father is his joy, no matter what the two are doing or having. So we, as loving children, pray, “*Hallowed be Thy name,*” the loving child’s cry of “Nearer, my God, to Thee,” “That we (all of us) may love Thee with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, with all our strength; that we may worship Thee and call upon Thee, and honour Thy holy name and Thy word, and serve Thee truly”; that God may be in all our thoughts, that our hearts and bodies may be kept in purity, so that we may be temples of the Holy Ghost.

When we pray “*Thy Kingdom come*” we are conscious of an uplift of heart, because we know by many signs that this is a time marked by the coming of the kingdom; everyone is better than he used to be, more generous and more gentle; people do not think of themselves, but of a great cause and of greater needs than theirs. “The men want God,” is true of us at

home, as well as of the men at the front. We sincerely want to be bidden; every man in the Service enjoys the “go,” and he goeth; “come,” and he cometh; do this, and he doeth it; which comes to one under authority. We are all proud of obedience and pray with good heart, ‘O Lord, our Governor, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth! Thy Kingdom come, O God, Thy reign, O Christ, begin!’ Let us hear the shout of a King in our midst, and ‘compel’ us to come in; raise up Thy power and come among us and with great might succour us; Thou who makest wars to cease and art wonderful amongst the kings of earth, who dost refrain the spirit of princes and peoples, shew Thy might upon the kings and peoples engaged in this war, and tune their hearts towards a righteous peace. O Lord God of hosts, go forth with our hosts! Remember O Lord that they are giving their lives for their friends, and in the cause of the helpless, and if it be Thy will, give the Allies a great victory in the

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cause of peace; but, victory or not, bring our every thought into subjection to the obedience of Christ.’

“Thy will be done”: We remember that the will of God is always good-will; that His will is our sanctification, that “our wills are ours to make them Thine,” and we believe that if we could only know God’s will we should do it; we perceive how, what seems to us an awful misconception of God’s will has brought desolation and misery upon the world; perhaps we too may be stiff-necked and rebellious and blind to the will of God, so we pray,—“Thy will, O God, be done.” Thy will is expressed in Thy law of love, Lord, have mercy upon us and incline our hearts to keep Thy law! Lord, have mercy upon us and write Thy law in our hearts, we beseech Thee! Make us willing and obedient and able to say, our delight is to do Thy will; because we are so dull and ignorant, grant that we may both perceive and know those things which we ought to do and also may have grace and power cheerfully to perform the same; and, O Lord, be gracious to the suffering and the sorrowing and enable them, too, to embrace Thy will in love, and to say with Christ, ‘I am content to do it, yea, Thy law is within my heart.’

Having prayed in some such sense we reach the later petitions, which appear to affect us more directly, with quiet minds; we are no longer in a state of restless urgency about our own affairs or those of our nearest and dearest. We perceive that ‘our daily bread’ includes whatever we need to satisfy soul and body, mind and heart. But while we think the matter over, certain sacred and familiar words come to our recollection, and we pray:—

“Give us this day our daily bread”; there is only one bread that can nourish and sustain us; Thou has said, I am the bread of life; give us, all of us, our portion of this bread to-day; send us not away empty lest we faint by the way; Thou didst come that we might have life and that we might have it more abundantly; feed us with food convenient for us, feed our hearts with the bread of life that we may love Thee and love one another; nourish our minds that we may understand, and think sincerely; nourish our souls that we may know we are made for Thee and have no rest until we find Thee; Grant us the bread of our bodily life, especially _____, and grant to each of us the things that we need most, especially _____.

While we pray that our Father would give us those things that we need and desire, a sense of undeservingness comes upon

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us; we know that we must be not only sustained, but forgiven; that all the bounty of our Father cannot avail us while we are tied and bound by the chains of our sins; we remember our

Saviour and pray:—

“Forgive us our trespasses”: we have sinned against Thee in thought and word and deed; the remembrance of our sins is grievous unto us, the burden of them is intolerable; send Thy Holy Spirit to convince us of sin, because we forget and do not realise; create in us a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within us; Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us, for how can we exact our little debts when Thou dost forgive our great indebtedness. Give us such love that we cannot bear to offend Thee, and such love for one another that we cannot choose but forgive those who injure or annoy us:

Only one petition remains; having the freedom of the City of God, seeking the will of God, sustained by the bread of life, relieved from the bands of those sins that most easily beset us, one fear remains; will it last? we ask, or will the old temptations assail us; will a great gulf again be fixed between us and our Father? So we pray,—

“Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil”: Save us all from those evil thoughts which assault and hurt the soul; save us from thoughts of pride and vain glory, of envy and hatred and malice, of jealousy and suspicion, from sudden anger, hatred and cruelty, from all thoughts of lust and uncleanness, from vindictive fury and murderous thoughts even of the enemy. Let no occasion lead our men in the field or us at home to forget Thee and fall into sin. Give us a child’s trust in his father’s care and deliver us all from those evils and calamities which we most fear; especially, save our men from disabling injuries; we ask all with the confidence children feel in a wise and loving father, for we know that *“Thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever, Amen.*

Should we thus labour in prayer during our first waking hour, and should a day of sweet serenity follow, perhaps we must be on our guard not to think that our personal happiness is the only answer to our prayer; according to our faith will it be done unto us, and we must believe that our feeble prayers will add appreciably to the impetus of the on-coming of the Kingdom of God. On the other hand, should our heart condemn us because our prayer has been cold and lifeless, God is greater

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than our heart and knoweth all things, and may discern that in our unworthy prayer which calls down the answer we desire.

I have ventured to sketch an amplification of the Lord’s Prayer which may prove suggestive, though of course enlargements of the several petitions will be formulated according to the wishes of the person who prays. I do not suggest this particular effort in lieu of any prayers that may now be in use. There are times and subjects for private and public supplication, as well as the deeper communion of the Eucharist, which may not be replaced. But this is an additional effort to which I should like to invite the members of the P.N.E.U. in order that we may help a little in the world-movement heavenward; and also as offering one more, and the greatest, alleviation to the anxious and the sorrowful. *“Women must weep”* we know, but praying takes the place of weeping and prayer brings peace.