No. 6.

On Flagey.
Job xxxi. 18. "What profit should we have, if we pray unto him?"

In every condition of life man is affected with the feeling of helplessness and the sentiment of obligation. Acknowledgment, gratitude, and supplication are evidences how much we depend on other beings than ourselves for a considerable share of our happiness. It is impossible to mingle in the world without having wishes and hopes, in the accomplishment of which we alone are incompetent, and purposes and objects which can be attained only by the assistance of those who have better means or more favorable opportunities than ourselves. Poverty and weakness may find protection in influence and power; the ignorant look to the enlightened for guidance and advice; and if there are some who are drinking the cup of sorrow, there are others who know how to throw into it those precious drops which assuage its bitterness. This seems to be at once an effect and a strong cement of society; and it is from this that we derive the exercise of some of our noblest and most generous dispositions and virtues. It teaches kindness, for this is what we mutually and constantly need it prompts to gratitude, for what worthy mind can
receive favour without being thankful to the bene-
factor? and there ever is, it should be produced by the
recognition of benefits, a sense of dependence and obligation
which will not rest in silence, but will display itself
in action and expression.

This sentiment, which the common intercourse of life
seems so obviously to produce, has as naturally been ex-
tended and fixed on higher and remoter objects. The weak
and frailty of mankind have at all times prompted
them to have recourse to some superior being, real or in-
imaginary, from whom they might solicit relief or assis-
tance. Men have been found without government or
laws; without the conveniences of life; in the arts of de-
human being; and without some method of growing
men; in their various forms, is abundantly su-
ficient to convince us of the inability of the human
mind, wholly unassisted, to form just conceptions of
which ignorance and fear have offered imaginary
thought of the absurd petitions and self-sacrifices
which ignorance and fear have offered imaginary
thoughts. It is the happiness of those, on whom the
red light of revelation has shone, to find the noblest
most worthy object for this strong
natural propensity of the mind. In the Bible we
are taught to pray. The character of God is disclo-
to us in all its beauty and glory. But this is not all;
we are told too that he is a God with whom we are not
only near, but are required to hold intercourse. We may
lift up holy hands, and say, "Our Father, who art in heav-
on!" This made our duty, as it should be our pleasure,
to offer to him the acknowledgments of admiring grati-
tude, and the tribute of praise from hearts deeply and
earnestly affected with his greatness and goodness, to
confess our sins with contrite humility, and to ask for his
assistance and pray for his blessing on every innocent de-
sire and every good purpose.

It is not only our duty, but our interest, to listen to
the precepts, and to obey the commands of Scripture. The
excuses and dispositions of mind, and habits of life, which
they enjoin, are obviously adapted to our advantage, and
necessary to our improvement and happiness. The divine
laws are laws of mercy and kindness, as well as of hol-
ness and righteousness. To be obstinate is to be prudent
and wise as folly. Yet such is the inconsistency of men,
that scarcely a precept can be enforced or a duty enfor-
ed, but the ungenerosity of selfishness or deformity will
be resorted to find excuses for its neglect, and to questin
or deny its propriety and utility.

Such has been remarkably the case with respect to the
duty of prayer; though one would think nothing can be
more reasonable in itself, or more salutary in its influ-
ones in the human character and condition. Let us then consider the nature and propriety of prayer, and its various advantages.

1. By prayer we understand a fervent, humble, and grateful address of the mind to God, the source of life and happiness, the Creator and Lord of all things. It combines the exercise of the powers of the understanding and the affections of the heart. The intellectual faculties must be applied to the investigation of the character of the Deity, and the knowledge of the divine perfections, or we shall never adore and reverence them as we ought. Conclude mind, and it is no longer a reasonable service, and man comes to himself before his God without that preeminent distinction which God has given him. But prayer is far from being a more mental effort. It is at once the exercise and consecration of the strongest and best feelings of which man is capable. It is an elevation of the soul, the exaltation of earnest desire, the promising of hope, the intention of gratitude. We are pressed with the consciousness of our ignorance and meekness, and we pray with humility; we are animated with the view of the Divine character, and we pray with confidence and joy; we believe God is ready to hear, and powerful to help, and so we solicit his mercy and assistance. Prayer is not intended to persuade God, but to dictate the mode or measure of his interposition, not to influence him with benevolence and compassion. It operates with a mighty influence on ourselves; it makes us feel our dependence and sinfulness, to excite and strengthen confidence in Him "with whom is forgiveness and plentiful redemption," to summon the energy and activity of our souls to the cause of righteousness, and to prepare us to receive and improve the mercies of our Saviour.

It appears, then, that the duty of prayer is founded on the nature and circumstances of man; as frail and guilty beings, and in the consideration of the perfections of God, as exalted to bless and save his creatures. And man, besides this, is divested of those internal acts and dispositions, which this duty requires and strengthens, who will be thoughtless enough to call devotion foolish or useless! Does it not, with the power of native eloquence, approve itself to the breast of every one, who thinks seriously and comprehensively on prayer? Objections have scarcely ever been made to prayer, which consist in acknowledgment, thankfulness, and confession. It is in a more limited sense, and considered as the offering of petitions, that prayer has been made the subject of doubt and dispute.

One objection, and that very common and often repeated, is drawn from the omniscience of God. Why, it is said, should we tell our wants, and send up our desires to Him, who knows them, before we ask, more perfectly than words can represent them? But he, who reasons thus, mistakes entirely the design of prayer. Pray...
or is not intended to inform God of our necessities and wishes. Where is he, who comes into the presence of Heaven, earth, and the prayers of the people? His providence and government to them? No, my friends, no one for a moment thinks of praying with such a purpose. Before prayer, in the proper sense of the word, it is a very different scene. Under a vivid impression that we are standing, in the midst of our affairs, in the presence of God, we think of him and express our anxieties and wants, which he alone can supply, that we may make the sense of our dependence on him, and of our own helplessness, more solemn, deep, and affecting. Prayer is designed, too, to express the earnestness of our desire, the wish to have and to cultivate those dispositions and affections which become us, make us holy, and improve us. It is more than a prayer for ourselves, who shall forbid us to pray? It is our duty to pray, that in the presence of God, as the barrier between us and the world, he may find in us the image of his own thoughts, and of his own dispositions and affections, which become us. It is the expression of our duties, and of our duty; it is the expression of our dependence on him, and of our own helplessness, and of our own duty; it speaks loudly of our sinfulness and of our own defects, and the circumference of God, as he loves to see the prayers of the humble and of the contrite, and of the sincere. We must make our minds, that are deeply impressed with the conviction of our own weakness and need of the divine aid, that does not find consolation in address.
fear and restrain prayer? Propriety, in this case, seems naturally to be determined by the dispositions of those who need protection or aid, and if they are worse enough not to acknowledge and solicit the goodness which supports them, they must incur the displeasure of their benefactors. In this way their sins are found between them and their God. Thus, though the sun is continually pouring its tide of light abroad in endless splendors, yet there objects excluded from his rays because the intervening cloud thins above them to the last shade.

Again, some have imagined that the immutability of God is inconsistent with the propriety of prayer, because who is without variableness, or shadow of turning, being influenced by the supplications of men, short-sighted, rash and ignorant as they are? But the objection proceeds on an inadequate and mistaken notion of the unchangeableness of the Deity. In what consists the Divine immutability, considered as to its exercise in the government of the world, and the course of Providence certainly not in the uniform action of precisely the same acts, whatever may be the difference of circumstances or situation. It is in always doing what is in itself right, and consequently it must have reference to the dispositions and qualifications of the beings, who are the objects of divine government. Nor as present and sincere prayer powerfully affects the character of the supplicant, that God should regard and answer it, so surely may it prevent something very different from changeableness, of that uneventful adhesion to the laws of gratitude, which is essential to exercise of the divine immutability. To suspend events on conditions implies nothing contradictory to the immutability of God.

We may not suppose that we are to be the inactive recipients of indiscriminate bounty. There is something for us to do as well as to receive. We have a part to act and duty to discharge, before we can become fit subjects for God’s blessing. The divine government is not exercised on without the use of means, and as prayer has a powerful influence in qualifying us for the favors which we hope for or need, to neglect it is not only unchristian, but irrational.

Who, that would be learned, free to study and instruction believing that the decree of heaven has unalterably destined him to knowledge, or doomed him to ignorance? And what should be think of the husbandman, who should dispense with the patient toil of industry, and wait to see his fields nothing in fertility or produce our barrenness, according as it had been determined by the God of nature? And is it less absurd to reject the ample means of procuring the favor of Heaven, and to reprove the neglect of duty, because we believe that God is immutable, and will determine every thing for us in the nearest and best manner? It is not so much to our necessities, as to our requests, that the promise is made, “Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you.”

And, the solemn voice of revelation has proclaimed, prayed to be a duty, a sacred and indispensable duty.
I remind you how often and how earnestly it is enforced in the word of God? and how much guile is there declared to be incumbent by the conduct of vice? The precepts of the Bible enjoin it: for the thing is taught, "to pray with out ceasing," to continue in prayer and watch unto the same with thanksgiving; it is enjoined by the example of the good, especially of Him who was the fountain of goodness, &c. the righteous," dedicated to devotion the solace and empraise joys of solitude, "When he had sent the multitude away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray." Is it not then a sufficient answer to those who would tell us of the uselessness of prayer, that it is strongly recommended by the finest dictates of reason: enforced with exegyng by the instructions of revelation, and sanctioned by example of Christ?  

II. Some of the advantages of prayer are to be considered. These are obvious and acknowledged:  

1. Purity of heart, and goodness of life are the legitimate fruits of the habit of sincere and fervent prayer. It is the powerful friend and strong support of virtue, approving and cherishing virtuous affections, giving vigor and vigour to worthy purposes. Who that considers the exercises, which a faithful discharge of this duty requires, will deny that such are its proper effects? To prayer belongs the expression of the sorrow of the soul and the act of penitence, and if we are indeed penitent, we are happy reformed. Men are easily induced to disprove vice, for it is not so easy to make them feel that they are vice. To plead the cause of goodness is often made and institute for being good, and he who is indignant against sin may imagine himself licensed to be sensual. But bring it, if it be from the heart, and such only deserves the name, will allow no such shuffling. Pria close and pressing duty, and it makes wise. Faithful to yourself, and forces you upon self-examination, and makes us look with a steady eye on the dark picture of our guilt.  

But not as the sacred fountain of the tears of penitence: for no one can seriously think of the sins, and what is more solemnly confess them to a God of holiness, with out repentance, and without humility? And from the midst of the reflections, which arise at such moments, does there not issue that warning voice which bids us "go, and sin no more? Truly the obliquity of wickedness must be softened into childlike sorrow; when with such feelings we address him, who is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, "for giving iniquity, transgres sion for sin." - Prayer, likewise, teaches us to confess some of dependence, and acknowledgments of mercies we have received, as well as petitions for those which we need: and, in this way, becomes the source of salted and refreshments. Gratitude is here mingled with devout hope, and the confidence of continual security and assistance. Praise and adoration are not overlooked by the immensity of the soul to whom they are addressed, but are raised to their highest adorations by the reflection that He who setteth in the heavens is our God, and take our friends.
that we are permitted individually to feel and appreciate
ated and personal interest in his beneficence and on every
shall not these thoughts shed a sanctifying influence
the Christian faith. Is he become the better for feeling
confessing that he is the object of the care of heaven?
Besides, we pray for our moral improvement, remember
the divine assistance, that we may understand better and
practice more habitually the duties of religion; that
we may be led from sin and occasions of sinning. No
to have and to express frequently such desires in sincere
must be a powerful help to break the force of tempi-
tion and to dispel the charms of vice. When the mor-
spreads before us these delights, which flatter only to
duce, and please but to betray, when innocence is all-
ed towards that deceitful and indulgent limit, when
inocence ends and guilt begins, whose virtue is aban-
don and vice embraces, when passion is loudly demanding
of gratification and struggling for the exercise of the rea-
nal force and strength of good purposes? Let us be
ited in moments of solitude and reflection. Will it not be the
best defense to remember that we have praisethese
variety of heart and strength of good purposes? Let us be
still more with the indignation of virtuous emotion. "Howe-
1. Do this great wickedness and sin against God."
but our prayers have other objects than our lives. We pray
for friends, and affection becomes more exalted and ac-
quired the strength of principle. While we pray for our
selves, we unburden the Christian spirit of meekness, and so pre-
t to encourage whether we have not needlessly provoked
by sinning. To pray for our country,


2. The spirit of devotion stamps all our views and con-
emplations with a noble and elevated character. It is easy
very true that our thoughts must receive their distinctive col-
ouring from the nature of the objects on which they are
transfixed. We are so constantly surrounded with the gross
of things by "time and sense," that whatever redeems our atten-
dition from the follies of the world, enables us to escape
the dominion of Sensible objects, and faces the mind on the distant, the future, the grand, and the
sublime, should be prized as a source of dignified hol-
ness as well as of pure virtue. Prayer, then, is a source of
the noblest enjoyment. For it is the employment of
our best thoughts and aspirations on their highest object.
It sends out the faculties to expati ate on the invisible
world, and they return to earth to communicate some-
thing of the purity and refinement they have received to
every object on which they are engaged. Surely it is no
be to think in earnest of the perfections, providen-
cal and government of God, the dignity and high destination
the soul, the excellence and worth of virtue, and the mean-
salvation by Y.C., without feeling doubts that human
is not designed to be exalted by what is low and base,
without being inspired with generous purposes and accom- 
plished views. If such be not the influence of prayer in avowing his mercy, providence, power, majesty, and it is more. 
instance, yet its habitual tendency is to erect such moral 
station—on the soil from the contaminating grossness 
of earth's sense. He, who comes into the presence of God with a full and feeling heart, to acknowledge the power, 
goodness, to express gratitude for the habits and 
prospects of immortality, and to supplicate the divine 
blessing on his virtuous intentions and resolves, can have 
left to feel the predominance of the future over the 
present, and to value the joys of Heaven beyond all 
other joys. He is taught to ally himself to God, and 
estimate the sanctity of the sacred relation. He knows 
how to bring under the influence of piety even the most 
severe cares and purposes of life, and to exult and to 
redeem those thoughts, which would otherwise be wasted 
on trifles, as polluted by the foul suggestions of vice. To 
him history and the occurrences of life are the records on 
the proofs of Providence, who is too wise to err, and 
just to do wrong. Consider, too, what an animation and 
light this devout spirit gives to our views of the world, to 
how it sanctifies even the investigations of science and 
the savings of imagination. When in springing the earth 
awakes to a new life, as it were, fresh and blooming from 
the hands of the Creator, when the Summer's seen in all 
his effulgent glory, pours abroad his fertilizing influence, 
cess, when Autumn comes to display the bounteous treasure 
of its plenty for man's enjoyment, when Winter manifests 
grandeur sends abroad the spirit of the storm to produce 
its terror, the man who is accustomed to adore and to praise 

"These as they change, Almighty Father! these 
"Age but the varied God. The rolling year 
"Is full of thee."

How different are the views of such a man from the 
world and cold speculations of one who can look through 
this mind beyond; without cursing and finding there the expression of its greater. To the one nature 

the herald of a God—to the other it is mere mechanism. 

4. In the spirit of devotion, which prayer produces, may 
be found a source of relief and consolation. Life is a 
school of moral discipline. Good hearts are not always 
adduced with delightful visions, nor does success al 
ways crown our efforts. Many moments must be yield 
ed to errors, and disappointment comes to agitate and 
sicken the heart. Pain and suffering are permitted 
to try and to chasten us. Unfavorable events trouble an 
people; the best propensities and the most prudent 
counsel; and the ways of Providence are to us sometimes 
shrouded in darkness, or involved in mysteries. Now necessary 
then is the confidence of trust and the hope of 

Other consoling lessons to look to are, when no cases can be 
direct, and no embarrassments perplex. The voice of con 

stant and disinterested would not be so often heard 
and there would be far less misery in the world, if 
not only the affairs of men were more past, and considerations, who 
under the smart of affliction, it is the affliction only
that occupies their thoughts, and the joy high gives enjoyment of the past and the prospects of the future are alike forgotten. There are many imaginary evils, the creatures of a disturbed or unsettled mind. Yet life has its real troubles; and to alleviate these we must go beyond life: we must habitually embrace in thought whole of our being; we must connect the sensible with the insensible world, and remember that now we do but see through a glass darkly. This is the solemn office of devotion. It is the spirit of prayer that will most effectually ease and soothe, animate and relieve in every trial. Do private griefs sting the soul with bitter anguish? Have the fondest affections been severed from their dearest objects, and are we left desolate in the midst of the world? Have our hopes been blasted and our industry and good intentions failed to secure success? O, is the world unjust? and proud is cruel? Is it us fly to the mercy seat, and while we adore, condescend, and supplicate, and love shall feel that the discipline of life is mercy, that the stranglings but to amend us, and brings us into trouble that we may remember what we are and be what we are destined; we shall feel how weak is man, and, how vain his pursuits, and the hope of immortality, like a beam from heaven, will dispel the gloom of dependence. Do our interest extended beyond ourselves, and are we apprised at the wrongs and outrages which exist among men? Is virtue indignant at the triumph of high-handed vice, and daring impiety? or does humanity mourn to witness the oppression of honor, and the insults of pride, to see the feeble crushed and burn the most resigned to oblivion?

returns sympathy could hardly have from complaint.

and not devotion teach us more enlarged and consoling views.

It teaches us not to confine our thoughts to the injustice and inequalities which be before us, but to consider them as parts in the system of that Being who uses the best means to offset the best ends, and bids us remember that we conserve the wages of Earnestness, that we are blind and ignorant. "Happy the man who sees a God employed in all the good He still that checkers life." In short, devotion is the chain which binds earth to heaven, rends the thunder, and the most elevated hopes, the noblest aspirations, most generous sympathies of man fall to the dust.

My friends, if the duty of prayer be itself reasonable obligatory, if it be intimately connected with all that can be called our permanent felicities, if it be enjoined by the solemn command of God, let us not be among those by whom it is despised or neglected. Let us never be presumptuous enough to forget our frailty, dependence, and weakness. Engaged in crimes to be relentless to our sins and to the memories of God. Let it be our aim to deserve, in its true and solemn sense, the testimony which gone to dwell at Sion, when the light of heavenly truth burst upon his mind, and the corners of penance broke in his heart, "Behold he prosperity"
At Watertown Jan. 31st. 1819 - forenoon

Mr. Fiske's (W. Lynn) May 23rd. 1819 - afternoon

the feeble muse and muse