

12. Though but at the outset of our argument upon this subject, we may as well at once make it known, that our own understanding of prayer, is in the plain or popular acceptation of the term. We hold that there is in it a real interchange between earth and heaven; and that for the requests of faith and piety which ascend from the habitations of men below, there do come down actual returns from the upper sanctuary. The asking upon the one side is met by a consent, and so a giving or a performance upon the other. Not all the visions of philosophy however beauteous could tempt us to such a freedom with the literalities of scripture, as to rationalize and explain away prayer, so as to reduce it in fact to a thing of nought. But while, in such a cause we should resist the seductions of philosophy, it is also our duty, as far as in us lies, to soften and if possible do away its prejudices. This of itself is an important object. And what at present inclines us more especially to the prosecution of it is, that we expect in the course of our argument to unfold the harmony which obtains between the spirit of activity and the spirit of devotion—to show that neither of these two supersedes the other, but that while labour without prayer may be utterly abortive, prayer does not supersede but should rather stimulate labour.

13. But let us, as we are able, meet the prepossessions of philosophy upon this subject; and if it may be, reconcile its disciples to that which in fact is the most natural and characteristic expression of piety, and certainly, the most powerful engine of religious cultivation.