

THE FORGOTTEN SECRET

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The forgotten secret by W. J. Dawson

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By

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*This book is inscribed
with the name of
Edward Everett Hale, Junior
with the author's
gratitude and regards*

The Forgotten Secret

I

DO we believe in prayer? It is a strange question to ask in a world which apparently accepts and honours both the habit and practice of prayer. Yet a thinker and scientific observer of the eminence of Sir Oliver Lodge has recently declared prayer to be the Forgotten Secret of the church. It is obvious, therefore, that before we can attempt any answer to the question, we must define with some precision what we really mean by prayer.

Some things about prayer we all believe, and are bound to believe, because they are accepted facts in the order of human life.

Thus, for example, we all know prayer to be a permanent habit and custom of human creatures in all ages of the world. Prayer is a fact in history. All religions are founded on prayer. And strangely

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enough, as it would seem, when we recollect the claim made by Christianity to the primacy of all religions, the practice of prayer is more evident among peoples who reject Christianity than among those who accept it. As one travels eastward, to those lands which have been the cradle of all existing faiths, the hold which prayer has on the common habit of human life becomes more evident at every step. From the high towers of cities "half as old as time," the sonorous and sweet voice of the muezzin calls the willing multitude to this act, which is the eloquent witness of things unseen. The camel-driver in the desert, the Lascar sailor on the ship, at the proper moment spreads his carpet, and regardless of curious or scornful eyes, addresses his silent invocation to the heavens.

In a Mohammedan mosque I once witnessed a scene which profoundly moved me. In the pulpit stood the reader of the Koran, and after each sonorous sentence four hundred men bowed their foreheads to

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the ground, reciting the response; and then followed a thrilling silence, through which throbbed the lingering echo of that solemn litany, as it reverberated round the vast dome, and died upon the porches of the ear. A Roman Catholic priest who witnessed the scene with me, exclaimed, "Surely God in His mercy must have a large place in His kingdom for these men, for He alone could teach them thus to pray." The kingdoms of the world and the glory of them may have been given to the western nations, and we may suspect by whom; but the older kingdom of the simple-hearted still is found among the dreamers of the East. The outward sign of that kingdom, now as ever, is prayer.

Concerning this universal habit of prayer, one thing at least may be said, if prayer has no meaning, and no definite relation to the economy of life, it is quite clearly the most extraordinary delusion that ever possessed the human mind. It is as though a man should stand at a tele-