



THE LANGUAGE
OF THE HEART

A Powell Davies

BY A. POWELL DAVIES

AMERICAN DESTINY

THE FAITH OF AN UNREPENTANT LIBERAL

AMERICA'S REAL RELIGION

MAN'S VAST FUTURE

THE TEMPTATION TO BE GOOD

THE URGE TO PERSECUTE

THE LANGUAGE OF THE HEART

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A Book of Prayers

by

A Powell Davies



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My brother kneels, so saith Kabir,
To stone and brass in heathen-wise,
But in my brother's voice I hear
My own unanswered agonies.
His God is as his fates assign,
His prayer is all the world's — and mine.

RUDYARD KIPLING



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Preface

A BOOK of prayers is different from other books: it is less a communication from the writer to the reader than an attempt by the writer to find words in which the reader may express his own thought, his own need, his own aspiration. Sometimes the identification is immediate, and without further thought the reader applies what the prayer contains to his own condition. Sometimes the prayer he reads may invite, for him, new insights which are only barely suggested by the words upon the page, and what finally he prays may be his own quite individual prayer. In both cases, as in many others, the book is fulfilling its distinctive purpose. The prayer the reader prays becomes his own.

Prayer, as I see it, need not conform to any system of doctrine; nor should it be expected that the content of any one prayer shall be verbally

consistent with that of others. The closer prayer is to life, the less likely is it that what is expressed at one time will be consistent with what is expressed at others. And it is to life above all that prayer should stay close. Circumstances change; so do moods and emotional conditions. At one time, there may be triumphant faith; at another deep dejection. Prayer should arise from whatever we really feel, directed towards mastery of our lives through growing insight and guided by our moral nature.

It is neither desirable nor possible that prayer should be literalistic in construction or constrained to abide by the strict rules of logic. It is the language of the heart, akin to poetry. Its concern is not with exact description, as that of prose so often is, but with reality itself and with the power to evoke our spiritual resources. Prayer goes on where other language leaves off: it has to do with what is least known and yet most deeply felt. The truth it touches is too great for logical precision and is corroborated not by argument but in experience. Nevertheless, prayer of all things should never be careless. It should carry integrity to its highest intensity.

Everyone prays, although not everyone admits it. Even a curse is a kind of prayer — a prayer inverted. Under the strain of difficult conditions, or in severe loss or bereavement, or when emotionally moved by a scene of great beauty — as at many other times when we are deeply stirred — there is something within us that cries out for expression. Though we cannot understand the mystery of the world about us, we feel its kinship with the mystery within us. This mystery, too, we do not understand but we know it in our own aliveness. Something there is that will not allow it to be silent; it speaks out in our own voices.

This is the beginning of prayer and it is natural to us. Beyond it lie all the possibilities that many have been eager to cultivate and which others have been willing to neglect — or even to disdain. Concerning the latter there is nothing at the moment that I wish to say. To such a book as this, a preface is appropriate but not an exposition and I am writing only for those who, like myself, are sharply aware of the limitations of human knowledge but who know that prayer is valid in experience.

Many of the prayers included were first spoken as pastoral prayers in a church service and were

extemporaneous. Others, especially those of only one sentence, were composed for use at the end of a sermon. A considerable number have been either edited from my notebooks or newly composed for this book.

The arrangement in sections will, it is hoped, be found convenient; but it is not intended as rigid classification. Some of the prayers included in one section might almost as well have been placed in others, which would always be true of prayers not written to a formula.

I am grateful, as always, to the people of my congregation in Washington, whose confidence has been to me an unflinching encouragement, and who have asked me for this book. And I dedicate it to all who find good in it.

A. POWELL DAVIES

Washington, D.C.
November, 1955

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I

THE UNENDING QUEST

☞ O GOD, we know we are a long way off; yet we can love no other journey. So guide us then, that be it soon or late, we shall arrive.

☞ O GOD, the quest of ages, found and lost and sought anew in every generation, make plainer to us what it means to seek Thy presence. We had believed that we could only find Thee when we were no longer baffled by life's mysteries, but the mystery grows deeper with the years; we had heard that Thou wouldst come, apparelled in refulgent splendor, cleaving the skies, but this we know is but a dream. It had been told us that to those who listened there would come a golden voice, as in the days of old, but nothing breaks the waiting silence. ☞ O God, amend our seeking! For we ourselves know better. We know that there is knowledge of Thee hidden in our hearts. We have heard Thee speak wherever truth is spoken, we have seen Thee in life's loveliness, we have felt Thy presence in all brave and generous deeds. ☞ Help us, O Thou who comest in these chosen ways, to find Thee where Thou art. Not in the mystery beyond the frontiers of thought; not in the cloven skies: but in our daily, common life.

☞ O GOD of our restless hearts' desiring, whom we both fear and love, believe and doubt, honor and betray, teach us by the contradictions of our own nature the meaning and purpose that are striving to find room in our lives. We have said to ourselves that nothing is certain: the true and the false — who knows them for sure? Good and evil — what at last do they matter? Too often we have seen honor forsaken, and beauty trampled, and love defiled. What then can we believe in? Where art Thou, O God? ☞ Yet, even as our doubt overwhelms us, a voice within us is whispering of faith. When we have surrendered to falsehood, truth has reproached us; when we have chosen evil, goodness has tormented us. O God, Thou hast not left Thyself without witness! Here in our disquieted hearts, Thy very silence chides us. ☞ Give back, O God, the vision we have dimmed, the truth that is blurred, the faith that has faltered. We will follow, even though it be in darkness, the star of promise, till the light of morning shines upon our path and we can see our way.

☞ O GOD of light and love, forever beyond our thought and yet the very breath of our lives and the power itself of all our thinking, help us to feel Thy life within our own. For though there is no form or image wherewith we can conceive Thee, yet we have known the soul uplifted and have watched the darkness pass away. Yea, even in the wilderness, we have seen the promise blossom as the rose, and in the desolation of the desert, have heard the echo of a song. ☞ We are earth's dust, O God, and our lives are swiftly lived. As the flower that fadeth and the grass that withereth, so are we. Yet we have felt life's glory break upon us and our dust has breathed Thy breath; by the high and holy we have been uplifted and have known ourselves as in the moment of creation: children of God and living souls. ☞ O Thou so far above us, Thou dwellest also in us; Thy life is ours, within our own.

☞ O GOD of our unending quest, whom we seek, and find, and lose, and evermore must seek again, bring us once more within the radiance of Thy presence. If we cannot see Thee, let it be in Thy light that we see all things else. For we have walked in the world in the world's ways and our sight grows dim. We have looked too much at the shabbiness about us, and have forgotten the vision that lifts up our eyes. We have gazed long at the world's ills and its evils, and we have not remembered the promise. We have felt the burden of the claims upon us and have been forgetful of our courage and our strength. We have nursed our disappointments and brooded over our defeats. We have gathered about us the torn shreds of our petty purposes as a shelter from the greatness of the life we fear will lay its touch upon us. And now we are tired of ourselves. ☞ Show us, O God, in simplicity what is wrong with our lives: our broken promises, our forsaken resolves, our flight from duty, our unwillingness for truth, our silence when we should have spoken, our deceit-

fulness and self-betrayal. And yet, how often we almost did well when we did ill! How near we came, at times, to hitting the mark! ☞ Give us, O God, new hope of ourselves, a rediscovery of our unused resources. Save us from lingering in vain regret. For even now, the tasks that we are able to perform are waiting for us; even now, we hear the call of duty.

☞ O THOU who hast given us powers we seldom use, and possibilities we all too readily relinquish, give us to see how much better we might be than we are.

☞ TEACH us, O God, once more, that victory never comes to those who pray for it if they will not rise up and seize it.

☞ O GOD who hast given us the earth in its beauty to be our home, help us to rejoice and be glad in it. Let us come to each new day with freshness of mind, and may our sense of wonder never forsake us. ☞ Help us also to be grateful for human fellowship and for the joy of discovering common aspirations and of sharing in combined achievements. For the power and outreach of the mind, lighting the dark places of fear and ignorance; for imagination and insight and the impulse to discover and create; for courage strengthened by defeat, spurring us on to greater efforts; for the resolve to take our part in the world, increasing the common store of good: for these and all the powers that Thou hast given us, help us now to be newly thankful. ☞ And give us to know, O God, that even as the earth about us is our home, so also beauty, truth and goodness are the home of our spirits. Help us to dwell at peace with them. Lead us away from all that would debase us and deplete us of life's zest. Cleanse Thou our hearts, O God, and lift us up.

☞ O GOD in the silence of whose presence the clamor of the world dies away, give peace to our hearts this day. For we are full of the unrest of our time, and the quietness that once we knew has left us. All about us is the loudness of discordant voices, seeming sometimes to shake the very earth, and we have listened far too long to those that speak the loudest. ☞ Give us stillness, now, O God: a calm, restoring stillness at the center of our lives. May we see the world as it is and ourselves as we are and understand our needs. And whatever stands between us and Thy peace, even if it seems precious to us, help us to cast it away. So may we come to our true selves, and beyond ourselves, to Thee.

☞ WE BREATHE Thy life, O God, as we breathe the air about us: help us to breathe it more deeply.

☞ HELP us, O God, lest our prayers, like our lives, be kept within too small an orbit. Even as we have walled ourselves in against the world, so would we wall Thee in, the imprisoned deity of our petty aims, fettered to our man-made altars.

☞ Smite us, O God, with shame and discontent! Open our minds to the claim of a larger life, and our hearts to the call of humanity. Help us to see that the problems we want to shut out, lest they demand too much of us, are the needs of people like ourselves. Make room in our thought for the great multitude of the needy, who have been stirred by a hope and have turned from despair to promise. Men and women in far-off places and of all races; little children whom hunger has despoiled of joy and wonder: these who share our common humanity, to whom we are bound by ties of blood and of the spirit: help us, O God, to listen to their pleading. Take our callousness away and stretch our hearts.

☞ O GOD of all good life, who art not far from any one of us, deepen within us our awareness of Thy presence. In the confusion of the world we have become lost; we are strangers even to ourselves. Come to us gently, O God, like the fading of darkness at daybreak: be unto us as when a journey, long and hard, is ended, and now at last we are at home.

☞ O THOU who art the end of all our seeking, Thou art the beginning, too. For we would not seek at all unless the need of it had breathed itself into our lives and the hope of it was in our hearts.

☞ MAY the little that we know, O God, become enough to guide us, while we seek the truth that no man knows and no man lives without.

☞ WHEN our doubts are greater than our faith, O God, help us to bring our doubts to Thee. There is nothing good we have not doubted — and yet it is the love of truth that makes us doubt. And truth is living; it stirs within us and goads us on in never-ending seeking — and in the hour of doubt, it stabs our hearts. ☞ O God, we cannot altogether doubt! In the midst of ignorance, there is a knowledge in us that can guide us, and in darkness we can find a light to lead us on. In weakness, there is secret strength and reinforcement, and even in despair and failure, there is courage and the power of new resolve. ☞ Nor can we turn away from the claim of righteousness. The just, the true and the good are always real. We say we do not know, we do not understand; but there is a knowledge that we cannot lose. We darken our own counsel, and yet there is no confusion that can hide from us the duty to be done. ☞ Be with us, then, O God in whom we only half believe, until from living by the best we know, we come to surer knowledge. The noblest lives that earth has known

began with trust like this; how can we go astray if, where they lead, we follow?

☞ HELP us, O God, when we have lost the joy we had in life and our faith in its goodness, not to spend too many hours alone and brooding. Remind us that what we lose within ourselves we sometimes find in one another: and give us eyes that look for it until we see it.

☞ O GOD, when we say that all Thy ways are dark and truth is hidden, help us to take our hands from our eyes.

☞ TAKE not, O God, the truth that blames us from before our eyes; nor Thy reproach from hearts that seek Thee: until truth has cleansed us, and Thou whom we seek art found.

☞ O GOD for whom we wait with desire and longing, and yet for whose coming we are always unready, help us to look into our hearts while we pray and see how fearful we are lest the things for which we ask might be given us. O God, we have prayed for the triumph of truth, and we are afraid of truth: how could we protect ourselves, unshielded by our lies? We have prayed for righteousness and that mankind shall do the will of God: but we are frightened by righteousness, and secretly have hoped that we can never know the will of God. O Thou who searchest the heart, we stand accused before Thee! We have said that we could not find Thee: that Thou wast hidden from us. But now we know: we did not want to find Thee; we were afraid. ☞ O God! These shams, this make-believe, these false pretences! When shall we lose them? These fetters of our own forging! When shall we cast them off? These prisons we have built about us! When shall we tear down the walls? Help us, O God, to put it off no longer! Help us to begin at once!

☞ O GOD to whom we come so often with needs to be satisfied, help us to come sometimes in gratitude for what we already have. ☞ For the rest and renewal of the nighttime and the freshness of morning; for the ever-changing loveliness of earth and sky; for the love of friends, and kindness and compassion when we need them; for the joy of human fellowship, and work to do; for all the ventures and endeavors in which we depend upon each other; for the greatness of our heritage and the inspiration of so many who have gone before us; for those who from earliest times fought back ignorance and fear; for the slow garnering of all enlightenment; for the values that we take for granted, and for so much goodness in our common daily life — for all these, O God, make us more ready to be thankful.

☞ O GOD beyond all utterance, the thought of whom we can never altogether think, when we cannot reach Thee with our minds help us to remember the language of the heart. Our thought goes out beyond the mind's horizons, straining to know, grappling with mysteries. But knowledge fails us; we have no comprehension. ☞ Then, in our disappointment there comes the sense that we are not defeated: there is a presence close at hand that warms us. The mystery that we could not enter in our thought becomes known to us in our yearning. O God, when we cannot know the truths that gird the world, help us to turn to the truth by which we live, interpreting the mystery about us by the mystery within us, until we have learned that life reveals itself through love.

☞ O THOU who hast called us to tasks beyond our wisdom and to labors beyond our strength, teach us to know that to those who follow when Thou dost call, wisdom and strength are given.

☞ O GOD, Thou art no stranger to our thoughts unless we make Thee alien to our lives. Amen.

II

THE HUMAN HERITAGE

☞ O GOD, give us to know that when Thy voice was heard in ages past, it was heard just as it is now — and that only those can hear whose souls have learned to listen.

☞ O GOD to whom through countless centuries generation after generation have come in prayer and worship, help us to remember how much we are a part of all mankind. Let us feel our kinship with those in ages past who first took up the fight against ignorance and fear, who slowly pushed back the frontiers of the unknown, who called upon themselves for courage to face a world of which they were afraid, who knew within themselves their own aloneness and the strangeness of their pilgrimage through life, and who built up powers of thought, sometimes in truth, sometimes in error, wherewith to bring inside the lighted area of the mind what for so long had been obscure and dark. ☞ Teach us not to despise those who knew less than we do, for apart from their struggle we who have come after them would know less than they. In their hearts, as in ours, truth battled with falsehood; they knew, as we do, the struggle of right against wrong. Give to us, as we remember them, a deepened gratitude and more sincere humility; and let us not forget the ignorance remaining, and the error left for us to overcome.

☞ BE WITH us, O God, in the remembrance of all lives greatly lived, which are our heritage. For those who strove for truth, and when they found it, spoke it; for those who could not see evil without crying out against it; for those who felt in their own hearts the pain of the injustice done to others; for those who condemned oppression and fought for liberty; for those whose aspirations raised the common level and the quality of whose life deepened man's humanity: for all who turned mankind towards the light of hope and spoke the promise of a brightening future, be with us in a deepened gratitude. ☞ With these, O God, more than with all others may we hold communion, finding new fortitude and reinforcement for the times in which we live, until by patience and persistence and enduring courage we become sufficient for the tasks that we must undertake.

☞ UPLIFT our hearts, O God, this day, in gratitude for the greatness of our heritage, bequeathed to us over the ages by the multitude of

those who went before. Be with us as we remember those who, even before the dawn of history, struck light from the flint of their own courage to guide them through the dark. In ignorance and barbarism, they dimly saw a truth that drew them onward, and though burdened with error and weighted down with superstition, they struggled forward, finding a path for those who followed after, so that we, because of them, take up our journey with a lighter load. ☞ For all the centuries of man's endeavor, help us, O God, to be truly grateful: for saints and sages, for prophets and exemplars, for those who not only pushed back the mind's horizons but who, through loving-kindness, stretched the heart. For all who turned harshness into mercy and compassion, and enmity into understanding, and who, through the warmth of their love, melted away hate. ☞ In solemn gladness, O God, that so much has been given us, we pray for new resolve that we may guard it and increase it, that the present may be worthy of the past and that the future may owe us some gratitude.

☞ HELP us, O God, to be grateful sometimes for common and familiar things. Let the joy and wonder of them be revived within our spirits, lest we take them for granted, unmindful of them, and our souls grow dull. For the good earth beneath our feet, for snowy hills in winter, for ploughed fields, for the cleanness of the countryside after rain, for blossoms on the grass, for the shadows cast by great trees: for these, O God, as for the over-arching sky, and stately clouds that pass across it, and the changing seasons and all the aliveness of nature, ministering to us from its strength and awakening our hearts to its beauty, help us to be thankful. ☞ And not less, O God, for all noble lives, bravely lived, for enduring labors and high endeavors, for all that inspires us from the ancient past and has become a part of our inheritance: help us not to forget that from day to day and from moment to moment our own lives are made possible and our experience enriched by those who have gone before us. ☞ Show us, O God, how large a life can grow from gifts like these.

☞ GIVE us grace, O God, to understand what it means to share in the human venture. Help us to call to our remembrance the many generations of those who have gone before, living on the earth as we do, searching for the meaning of life as we search for it, hearing the call of duty as we hear it, entering the struggle between true and false, fighting the battle of right against wrong, deciding between love and hate, even as we do. Join us in spirit to those who fought until they triumphed, raising the level of our common life and broadening the scope of human possibility. ☞ Help us to know that what was done by them, we can do: that greatness of life is not the gift of circumstance but the fruit of high resolve. Let us not say that such living was for others but it cannot be for us. Take away our shelter, our evasions, our excuses. Join us, O Spirit Holy, to the greatness of the venture, until we are ennobled by it and its joy is in our hearts.

☞ O GOD of life's venture, long ago begun, we are thankful this day for pioneers of the spirit who taught the world not to be afraid of doing good: for those who changed enmity into friendship, and took compassion into desolate places, and fed the hungry-hearted with their love. Help us to learn from them, and when we think our own task is too great for us, remind us, O God, how much greater is the courage to attempt it.

☞ SAVE us, O God, from forgetfulness of all the benefits that come to us from bygone ages, lest we become unworthy of our inheritance, and, in reaping from the past, neglect to sow anything worth harvesting in the future. ☞ And when it seems to us that our times are too oppressive and that evil casts too great a shadow, let us know that so it seemed to those who went before us, and that we can find, as they did, that the prayer for courage is the prayer that never goes unanswered.

☞ AS WE remember those who, from ages past, have bequeathed to us so much, touch us, O God, for a saving moment with the greatness that makes men humble and with the humility that makes men great. Amen.

III

PRAYERS SPOKEN IN CHURCH

☞ IN THE solitude of each, which none can lose and none may share, as also in the fellowship that binds us thus together, O Holy Spirit, make Thy dwelling with us.

☞ O HOLY and Eternal Spirit, whose temple is the whole world and whose dwelling-place is in the hearts of all mankind, we know that Thou art everywhere and that Thy presence never leaves us. Yet we are thankful for appointed times and chosen places where, in fellowship with one another, our spirits turn to Thee. This day, this hour, and in this place, do Thou be near us. ☞ Give to us a remembrance of things past. Remind us of the many who have come here, as we do now, bringing their joys and sorrows, their hopes and fears, their victories and defeats. ☞ Bring to us in this, the hour of worship, a deepened sense of the inner meaning of Thy church, that always when we meet thus it may be in the knowledge that here, in opening their hearts to Thee, the weary have found rest, the sorrowing, comfort, the despairing, new faith. Here, too, the young have seen the shining vision, and those who are in the midst of life's journey have been strengthened, and to the aged there has come repose. ☞ In this place, O God, made sacred by the prayers of those who went before us, help us to know our

own hearts' yearnings, and in our needs to turn to Thee.

☞ O THOU in the consciousness of whose presence the desires of our hearts are deepened and before whom the greatness of our need cannot be hidden away, teach us the wisdom of our own spirits and the lessons left us by experience. We have listened to the counsels of the mighty ones, the saints and sages, speaking to us over the centuries, and yet we do not know. And so in our perplexity we have reasoned with ourselves and have said that no man knoweth and that all is vanity. ☞ Yet our own lives teach us. We have learned how lost we are and how desolate our path when we forsake the truth we know is true. We have discovered how hate and bitterness can despoil us of life's joy and beauty, and that cowardice will always shrink us. We have learned how desperate is our need of love. ☞ Then, give us, O God, to sift out this wisdom and to live by what it teaches until we find Thy laws in our own lives,

and by obedience to them come to know at last Thy peace.

☞ IN SPIRIT and in truth, O God, we turn to Thee. From words without meaning, from empty forms, from semblance and pretense, from all that is imposed by habit and endorsed by custom, and from shallowness of every kind, unfetter and deliver us. Let not these moments pass in vain. Help us to resist the wandering thought, the worthless aim, the ill-considered prayer. Give us to search our hearts until we know our needs. And bring us anew to what the meaning of our lives should be.

☞ O GOD, from torpor and lethargy, from sloth and apathy, and from all that dims life's lustre and robs us of its zest, be with us now to save us. Lest our worship be dull and our spirits joyless: and in our hearts there be no song, and on our lips no prayer.

☞ O HOLY and Eternal Spirit, life of our minds and breath of our being, bring us once more to full remembrance of Thy presence. Strangely do we walk through the days of our years, unseeing, unhearing, inattentive, and the glory of life is all about us and we do not know that it is there. We wrap ourselves up in the petty and the trivial, and sometimes even in the mean and sordid, shutting out life's promise. We are afraid of life — afraid of its truth and goodness and its mighty claim upon us — and we wall ourselves in, thinking to be safe: and so we scarcely live at all. ☞ Break down the walls, O God! Let winds that have swept the far horizons blow now upon the barriers that we have built to keep us paltry! Let them all be swept away! That the light of the heavens may light our lives, and the vision of good enlarge our minds, and the love of God find room in our hearts.

☞ GIVE us to know, O God, how vain are all our hopes, how empty all our prayers, until we ourselves are ready to fulfill them.

☞ O THOU who strengthenest the hearts of men and makest peace to dwell therein, we bow our heads in stillness, waiting: we would be found of Thee. Our need is great. Where can we turn when the weariness of the world is upon us, and our burdens are too great for us, and we do not know our way? Even these words that we speak, O God, are like far-off echoes of the prayers we long to pray; we have no language, there is no utterance for what is in our hearts. ☞ And yet we pray. This groping of our minds beyond their reach! This stretching of our souls! O God, who dwellest in the mystery so far above us, dwell also in this mystery within us! The hope of our promise, the strength of our struggle, the throb of our pain! ☞ We wait, O God: and in our waiting, come to know. We must be cleansed. We cannot fight against Thy righteousness and not be weary; we cannot in rebellion find Thy peace. We see Thy way. Be with us, now, be gently with us while we rise to follow. Be with us in this hour of new resolve.

☞ O GOD, in whose closer presence the discords of our lives are stilled, help us to find the quietness that we need. For we move in haste through a world of sound and fury, turning from one interest to another, and with no guiding aim. Seldom do we stop to ask ourselves where we are going, and whether, if we gain our ends, they will seem to us a rich reward. ☞ Help us in these moments of prayer to regain our simplicity and to marvel anew at life's wonder and at the wonder of our own lives — even that we are here at all! And the good earth beneath our feet and the blue sky above us, and the beauty of the changing seasons; and that we have friends, communities and a rich heritage; and that besides the beauty of the earth is all the beauty made by man: the painters, the builders, the poets, the music makers. And that there have been so many heroes and such high exemplars, some of whom were faithful even unto death. ☞ How fragile, yet how brave this human venture! Open our eyes, O God, to its many splendors and its beckoning greatness! Let us see how small

are all our selfish aims, how unimportant our frustrations. Thus may we rise from what we were and be our own best selves, worthy of the gift of life and eager to be pilgrims.

☞ O GOD whom we hope to serve some other time, remind us how little time we have; tomorrow Thou has not given: only today.

☞ TEACH us, O God, that prayer is not fulfillment but preparation.

☞ SAVE us, O God, from living day by day from disappointment and frustration, lest we measure ourselves down to the poorest we have done, and give up trying to do better. Give us to know how limitless is human possibility. Breathe life into our souls.

☞ O THOU to whom we come by custom and pray by rote, asking so much and expecting so little, surprise us sometimes with a true awareness of Thy presence and bring us to sincerity. So much that we do, we do only because it has been prescribed for us and because we have done it before. Stir us, O God, into aliveness of spirit, lest we go through life like sleep-walkers and spend our days as a dream.

☞ HELP us to know, O God, that the saints and sages were living people, just as we are, and that they speak to us, not from the musty pages of their books or from the sleeping stillness of their sepulchres, but from the liveness of the soul's experience answering to our own. When they tell us of a better way to live, help us to listen to them with our hearts as well as with our ears, that we, too, may feel the surge of life sweep through our worship, and find the truth that guides the soul to greatness in our prayers.

☞ O GOD of all good life, to whom we come in our continuing need, be present to us in this hour. So easily we lose our way; so soon and so often we forget what manner of people we are. In the moment of insight and aspiration, our resolve is high: we feel the claim of goodness upon us, we are drawn to truth, we are warmed with the touch of beauty. Then we walk in the ways of the world and these things depart from us. We live carelessly, fretfully, irritably. Life brings us less of joy than of disappointment and frustration; and we permit these things to enter into our spirits and bemean life's goodness and embitter its gladness, and we are not what we want to be. ☞ Sometimes, too, as we look at the great world about us, we are filled with the terror of it and we ask ourselves who is sufficient for the need of the times. Our anxieties blot out all confidence, and faith is subdued by doubt, and courage gives way to fear. ☞ Give to us now, O God, to recover what we have lost. Join us with the great and good of all ages and with the multitude of those who, in this our own time, still believe in the promise and who are guiding

their lives by the best that they know, in the hope that goodness may prevail. ☞ Strike off our fetters! Let fears be vanquished! Set free the courage of the soul within us! Be with us in this hour of new resolve.

☞ O THOU whom we try to touch with the farthest outreach of our prayers, teach us how near Thou art when prayer comes home and lights its lanterns for the path before us.

☞ O GOD whom we seek where Thou art not, and forsake before we find Thee, lead us to listen sometimes to our own prayers and to look more intently at what is in our hearts.

☞ BY THE fuller living of our own lives, O God, help us to find the meaning that life is trying to teach us.

☞ HELP us, O God, lest we make our prayers a substitute for what we should do with our lives; what our prayers begin, may our lives continue.

☞ O GOD, in the awareness of whose presence our hearts are gladdened and our strength restored, be with us in our worship. Renew in us the sense of life's goodness and the vision of its beauty, that we may find joy and gladness as we journey on our way. So much that is precious we so easily lose, and so much that is worthless we struggle to preserve. Help us now to reflect more searchingly on the inwardness of our lives. Deepen within us our knowledge of our real needs. Lead us to know more surely what life should be. ☞ Even with eyes that have been dazzled by a world of glittering baubles, help us to see the heavenly vision. Even in hearts that are fearful, let there be a prayer for courage. Give us to see ourselves as we really want to be. The duty we shirked has left a painful memory in us; we know how near we came to undertaking it. The truth we left unspoken remains to trouble us; we remember how near we came to speaking it. The kindness we withheld, we could have given; we need not have been vengeful or spiteful: we felt the impulse to be generous. We wanted to be good. ☞ Save us, O God, from all

despairs, and especially from those with which we shield ourselves and make excuses, saying that it is not in us to be better than we are. For we know the truth: we love the goodness that we turn away from, and whenever we are willing, we can serve it. Help us to have faith in the promise: even the promise that is in ourselves. Let us not add to the hopelessness that is in the world. Let us have faith that we can be a part of what moves forward, pushing back evil and establishing the good. Make us one with all that in mankind is struggling onward, groping towards new life, toiling for a better day.

☞ O THOU whose witness is our heart's unrest, teach us how simple is the truth that saves us, and how near the courage in which journeys are begun.

☞ TEACH us, O God, that when our fetters seem too strong to break, the time has come at last when we must break them.

☞ ETERNAL SPIRIT, who givest wisdom, show us how much of what we pray for in the world about us is waiting to be found within ourselves.

☞ ETERNAL SPIRIT, who dwellest not in temples made by man but in the hearts of those who seek thee, reconsecrate us by the worship of this hour. If we come in joy, let us draw strength from it; if we come in sorrow, touch us with thy great compassion; if we have lost our way and the darkness has overtaken us, let the light of Thy presence appear before us that we may see our path; if we are weak and discouraged and know not where to turn, remind us of the resources Thou hast given us and that there is no friend like fortitude. ☞ As with ourselves, so with our world. We hear, O God, of great and fateful possibilities that lie like shadows menacing the future. We have learned of agencies of vast destruction, and we are much afraid. We know how few of us are good or wise. And yet we hope. Deepen our hope, O God! In quietness and in confidence, let us take counsel of the best in our own hearts and believe that it dwells also in the hearts of others. Give us to look back and see how far mankind has come, and by what toils and labors and what great endeavors. Shall we not go forward still? Against

the evil, shall we not pit the strength of a growing love of goodness? Against fear, bring courage? And against doubts, the power of faith? ☩ O Thou who has lighted our minds with the vision of the future's promise, help us to see that its brightness still shines, and that only we ourselves can take it away.

☩ O HOLY and Eternal Spirit, bring to us in this, our worship, a deepened fidelity to all that we know is good, an unfaltering devotion to the true and just, a dedication to the removal from the earth of all that curses it with hate and greed and lust of power and dooms its peoples to despair and misery; and help us to resolve to build, no matter what our doubts and fears, that better world of love and peace and brotherhood which yet shall bring to human life the flowering of its ancient promise. Be with us, Thou who gavest us this hope, as in our toil and tears we try to bring the prophecy to glad fulfillment!

☩ O GOD, whose spirit is the breath of our lives and the strength of our souls, awaken within us the solemn sense of life's significance. For we remember how carelessly we have thought, how hastily we have spoken, how heedlessly we have lived; and the good that is in us has gone astray. ☩ So much we have done has brought us no contentment; so much of our living is not by our resolve. In the hour of insight, we promise to follow the true and the just. We do not withdraw the promise: we become unmindful, we forget. Give us then to see the reason for our discontentment. Help us to know how much more we might do of what we really wish; and in the doing of it how much more we might become of what we really choose. ☩ And when, in the wider world, so dark with mystery, our thoughts reach out after life's larger meanings, help us to see that we shall never know them while our own meanings remain so small. If we live in littleness, using life's opportunities only to gratify our petty wishes, how paltry must our lives become! Give us to see the wider claim upon us, the urgent purpose, the

call to high aims, the need to serve. ☞ Then, lest we lose ourselves in dreams and visions and far-off purposes, show us the tasks that are waiting for us, here and now and close at hand.

☞ O GOD who in the loneliness and mystery of life hast given us friendly meeting places and fellowship with one another, be with us in the purpose of this hour. The pace of our lives is slackened now and we are unhurried. There is time for confusion to be dispelled and the fevers of haste can melt away. If we will, we can see more clearly, think more truly, choose more worthily, and our lives can be lifted up to a higher plane. So let it be with us, O Holy Spirit! Help us to be willing for what we most need rather than eager for what, in our carelessness, we thought we wanted. Remind us how much contentment can come to us when we do our duty and how radiant life can be when we give ourselves to its highest meanings and its noblest purposes. Cleanse us, O God! Heal us and make us whole!

☞ TEACH us, O God, by what we doubt to find the way to what we believe; and the way that we find, strengthen us to follow it.

☞ O GOD, show us that the truth we see with our minds will never be greater than the truth we love in our hearts.

☞ O GOD whose voice is softer than the gentlest rain, but whose word can never be broken, help us to know that only when we do Thy will can our hearts contain Thy peace.

☞ WE HAVE come here, O God, all of us together, that each of us may be alone. Help us not to be afraid of our aloneness, when unreality falls away and we are face to face with our own souls. For it is in this solitude that we come close to Thee.

☞ O THOU whose presence never leaves us day or night, but of whom so easily we live in unawareness, make this, our worship, the hour of revelation to us. We know that we have lived on the surface of life, seeing so little of it, speaking words of small meaning, yielding up our minds to worthless fantasy; and now we feel the sense of something missing, something lost, and in our hearts is the dull ache of our incompleteness. ☞ Help us now, O God, to make room for thought that ennobles, and to turn our self-love into a love that goes out to others, and to feel the flow of sympathy. If we have built about ourselves walls of defense to keep the world out, show us how our fortress has become a prison, and how, in trying to save our lives, we have largely lost them. Make us in these moments a true part of all mankind, sharing its hope, suffering its miseries, striving for the better way. Set free within us the warmth of friendliness, the love of the gentle and the good. And the prayers that we do not want to pray, because they would commit us to hard tasks or re-

quire that we forsake our selfishness, help us to pray them. Yea, O God, more than all others, let those be the prayers that we pray.

☞ IN THIS quiet place, O God, help us to find quiet for our souls. For we need quietness. Shouting and tumult are always about us, and the noise of the world never dies down. Even in the nighttime when we seek rest, the voices of the day go on. But in Thy presence, there is quietness. O God, let us find Thy presence now!

☞ O GOD, the light of our minds, the power of our thought, the breath of our lives, draw closer to us in this hour of worship. For its moments come and are swiftly gone, and once more we shall walk in the world in the way of the world. Grant to us now that forgotten things may be remembered, and that things precious that are lost may be restored.

☞ O GOD who hast made us for Thyself, so that we cannot find rest until we find it in Thee, be with us now. For our thoughts are all disquieted, the unrest of the world is in our souls, and we are distracted and confused. We know that much that we do is done with little thought and we have come to fear that most of it is not worth doing. What might have availed us, we have neglected, and whole worlds of possibility we have ignored. Bring us now, O God, to a better sense of what we inwardly are, and let us know our souls and the needs of our souls. ☞ We remember that we have sought empty preferments and have loved small ambitions, putting ourselves ahead of others. We have felt enmity and hate although we knew that only love brings joy, and petty frustrations have embittered us. We have cast the shadow of our discontents in the paths of other people, stealing away the gladness that they had in life and making their hope of goodness less. And now we are afraid that the loveliness of life has passed us by. ☞ O God, help us to believe that we can

do better! Help us to resolve upon it, here and now! And in the sincerity of this resolve, quieten our unrest! O God, we need Thy peace!

☞ WE HAVE come together, O God, in the solitude of each and the fellowship of all. As we have not lost our solitude in coming together, so let us not lose our togetherness when we are apart. And let the prayers that we have prayed with bowed heads be still with us when we stand upon our feet and face the world.

☞ O GOD, the moments of our worship quickly pass: let not our hearts forget. Amen.

IV

THE CIRCLING YEAR

☞ O GOD who hast given us to share earth's life and to know its times and seasons, give us grace so to live that we may love what Thou hast given.

TIMES AND SEASONS

☞ HELP us, O God, in a world so full of what is wonderful, ever changing, ever surprising us with new revelations of life's power and beauty, to accept with gratitude all that gladdens us, and with fortitude all that brings us grief. ☞ Let us take time to watch the morning and the evening skies, to look often and long at the marvellous earth and all that lives upon it, to be with heart and soul a friend and neighbor and a part of humankind. ☞ Let us rejoice in the heritage bequeathed to us from yesterday, and in the festivals of faith and hope. Let us look at our world as it is, and seek a wisdom that is not censorious. Let us look into our own hearts and be brave enough to separate the evil from the good. Let us be learning always, from all that we see and do, and from all that happens to us. And if shadows overtake us, let us not dim within ourselves the light that helps others to live. ☞ Give us, O God, to carry with us the kindness that we look for, to be gentle as we wish the world were gentle, and by being loving, to bring closer to fulfilment all that is the fruit of love.

THE NEW YEAR

☞ O GOD of timeless ages, in whom the past, the present and the future meet and are as one, we bow ourselves before the everlasting. Our years are few; swiftly they come and go; and soon, we know, the children of an hour must give Thee back the breath that gave them life, and transiency be lost in the eternal. ☞ And yet, within the shortness of our days the flame burns bright and in its radiance we behold the mystery about us. The voice of hope sings in our nighttime. Faith points us to a far-off dawn. The silence speaks; the darkness glows. We hear a quiet, insistent whisper in the soul. ☞ We are children of earth, whose years must soon be spent; and yet, O God, we have beheld Thy glory. Amid the strangeness and the haste, we have seen the march of destinies. Forlorn, we have known a solace; alone, we have felt a presence. The high and holy has laid its touch upon us, and our dust is lighted with immortal dreams. ☞ We trust the dreams, O God, and go in faith, not knowing! We hold aloft the sacred

light and venture forward through the dark to face the future now unfolding.

☞ O GOD in whose providence we are come to the beginning of another year, give us courage for the journeys that lie before us. We know not where our path may lead, or what trials we must meet, but with Thy light to guide us and Thy strength to arm us, we hope we shall not falter, or, in the darkness, lose our way. Breathe into us, O God, the faith invincible. Make us stronger than anything that can happen to us: that, without fear at the beginning and without shame at the end, we may give ourselves to the venture.

☞ O THOU who hast given us the far-off vision of a better world to be, help us, with the passing of our years, to take the steps that lead towards it. And though we come not within sight of our goal, may we bring it nearer for those who come after us, laboring where we have wrought, sharing our hope, singing our song.

SPRINGTIME

☞ O GOD of the morning of the world, by whose bidding the earth is stirred with new life and at the sound of whose voice creation wakes and sings, open our hearts to the gladness of this season and may the freshness of its beauty cleanse our souls. Forgive us, O God, that so dim-sightedly we go our way, in haste and fever and with fretful aims. Lift up our eyes! Let us see the wonder all about us! Not a fragile petal on the tiniest of blooms but Thou hast given it creation's glory; Thy miracle of life is wrought anew with every blade of grass. ☞ We thank Thee, O Creation's Lord, for this renewal of life's unfolding, this revelation of Thyself that never grows old. May the joy of it restore our hope, its loveliness enrich our understanding. May the beauty of it breathe itself into our spirits, and its promise mingle with our prayers.

☞ GIVE us grace, O God, lest we walk through the earth in the springtime of its loveliness with eyes unseeing and in our hearts no song. Stir within us our own true life that it may share in all the life of which it is a part. Ours is creation's joy, and ours the wonder of its everlasting newness. These blossoms while the snow still lingers! These budding branches high against the sky! This song of birds, this warmth of sunshine! This scented air, this greenness of the grass beneath our feet! Fill us, O God, as in the springtimes of our childhood, with earth's great wonder! Give us to hear again creation's song!

☞ O GOD, so touch us with the soul's eternal springtime that no wintry hour of life shall blight our faith or freeze our hearts.

PALM SUNDAY

☞ WE ARE thankful this day, O God, for the beauty of the earth renewed, for the loveliness of life and for its promise, and for everything that brings awakening to the soul. ☞ We are thankful for all lives great and good, the memory of which can never perish, and the power and influence of which increase as we become more ready to receive them. We are thankful for those who in the mystery of life could find their path: those who in darkness lighted a lamp for other men to see by; those who could bring to utterance the sacred insights of the spirit: those who have made more plain life's nobler way. ☞ And we are thankful for those the goodness of whose lives was more than lesser men could suffer the reproach of: those who were faithful unto death. Especially we think of Jesus, who walked in Galilee, carrying the radiance of his vision with him and speaking simply to simple people so that they found new confidence and hope. And of Jesus whose mission grew and took him to Jerusalem, where the people who had known and loved him hailed him as their

King. ☞ Brief was his triumph, followed swiftly by his anguish! Yet we can hear hosannas still, echoing to us through the centuries, and when we remember him, love takes possession of our hearts. ☞ In him, O God, Thy spirit was a pure, white flame. We shall never forget him; no, nor all the generations that come after. He has laid upon the ages the touch of his humanity; he has marked out a pathway from Nazareth to God.

☞ BLIND leaders of the blind, O God! They chatter on and on! The noise of the ranter rasps through the temple courts, the false defiles the holy place, hypocrisy stands prating at Thine altars. ☞ But we look back and centuries dissolve like mist. We see him, we can hear his voice, our hearts acclaim him. He goes before us, saying "Follow me."

☞ O GOD, we thank Thee that in the texture of our common life, there shines forever this golden thread.

GOOD FRIDAY

☞ THE earth is green again, O God, and it is Springtime. Trees break into blossom; the air is warm and sweet as in the morning of the world. And we remember Jesus, who loved all this as few have ever had the power to love it; to whom each revelation brought a joy so close to pain it stabbed the heart with beauty. We remember how this beauty mingled with his strength and gave him wisdom and compassion. We remember the truth he spoke, and that he dared to speak it; and the purpose that he would not turn away from even when his path grew bleak and all was dark before him. And we remember that at last he went to breathe once more the fragrance of the spring before he died: in a garden where the loveliness of life was turned to anguish, and his sweat was red-dened with his blood. ☞ We remember this and know that Jesus speaks for all the truth that we have turned away from: all we have loved but not enough to follow: all we have given our hearts to, only to betray. ☞ But this it is that shall redeem us. For we know that Jesus will never be silenced:

that we shall hear his voice always, calling us to give ourselves to what alone can save us, telling us that all is lost until we find our souls.

☞ WE ARE grateful this day, O God, for all the sages, saints and martyrs who have given of themselves to save mankind because the command was laid upon them. And towering among them, the Man from Nazareth, who in so short a time lived so much promise into life. We can see him still, and the brightness of his presence, coming to us over the centuries; his love still warms us, though the words in which he spoke it were so long ago. And we remember how at last, reluctant to yield up so rich a life, yet willing if it must be, he went in anguish to the cross; and thus he won his victory. ☞ We stand, O God, and marvel at so great a sacrifice. When will we receive Thy prophets and Thy saints? How long must love be crucified? We bow our heads and in the stillness of our thoughts there comes a new resolve: he shall live on! Our hearts will make him room! Until throughout the world such love as his has won its victory.

EASTER

☞ AS THE earth, O God, is resurrected into life, and we see once more its beauty, so may it be with our souls. Let the winter-time of doubt dissolve and all the frozenness of our refusals melt within us. Deepen our faith that evil shall be vanquished, that good at last shall be triumphant. Let not Easter come to earth, O God, and come not to our spirits!

☞ Revive our faith! Let the sepulchres of our despair be opened! Let darkness pass; let dread be left behind! Let weeping be turned into joy, and lamentation into singing! And the beauty of Thy peace, O God, let it be upon us.

☞ WE THANK Thee, O God, for all the stirring of life renewed, for the warm winds and the whispering of leaves on trees, for the sweet new fragrance, for the brave colors of life's streaming banners, carried once more to victory over death. And for the soul's triumph, and the transmuting of tragedy, and for the true and the good which are crucified but never die. Breathe into us, O God, the quickening breath of the life which was before the pageant of the worlds began and shall be evermore.

☞ O GOD, the festive earth rebukes us! How can our hearts receive Thy joy? Man's inhumanity to man has laid its curse upon us! What shall we do with the disquiet of conscience, with the smear of blood across our vision, with the ache of guilt in our hearts? How can we banish the desolate thoughts that come to us from far-off places, telling of beauty trampled, of perished lives cut off in the springtime of their promise, of ravaged lands laid waste by war?

☞ Give us, O God, an Easter of the soul: new life, life stronger than death, life triumphant over evil, strengthening our fearful hopes and unsubstantial dreams until they have become a mighty purpose, and we are ready for its service.

☞ O GOD, the light of ages and the life of all that lives, who speakest unto the darkness and it is morning, who breathest into earth's dust and it lives, be with us in this day of faith and hope, to cleanse our hearts and make us worthy of life's joy renewed, and of its song and exultation, its glory and its gladness.

MEMORIAL DAY

☞ WE BOW our heads this day, O God, in memory of those who laid down their lives that others might live. They redeemed for us our liberties; they saved us from oppression and debasement; they pushed back barbarous evils that were threatening to engulf us; they gave us, at fearful cost, the promise of tomorrow. ☞ To them, as to us, the life of earth seemed fair and bright; they loved the blueness of the sky, the firmness of the ground beneath their feet, the snows of winter, the blossoming of spring. They loved the works of man, the busy world, the tasks before them. They loved their homes, their families, the companions they had chosen for life's journey, their intimates and friends. ☞ But more than this they loved the virtue that mankind must live by: the truth that was being trampled and the vision that had been profaned. They loved their honor and their duty. And so they fought and died. Let not their lives be given in vain! ☞ Let our hearts remember, O God of Mercy, the many who waited for them and who learned at last that they would not return. Let there be a stillness in us, a deepness

of humility, when we remember the bereaved. ☞ O God! that some should give so much! And others almost nothing! Stir us, arouse us, goad us on to new resolve! We have been willing to forget, we have served the trivial moment and not the opportunity they gave us. Turn us away, O God, from living in life's sheltered places. Deepen our soul's disquietude, our heart's unrest. Until we are willing for the claims upon us, made sacred by the sacrifice of those who died.

☞ THEY gave us tomorrow! The tomorrow they themselves would not return to share. They left us bright dreams! Dreams that for them could not come true. Paid for in blood: the blood of youth with pulse and passion; and in the grief of the vainly waiting, who were told that those they loved would not come back. This was the cost: the cost unspeakable! O God, be with us! Make us worthy! Lift us up in high resolve!

☞ WHEN we remember, O God, those we have loved and lost, help us to remember also how great a thing is loving, and that not to have loved would have been far greater loss.

NATIONAL OCCASIONS

☞ O GOD who hast given us the vision of a righteous nation, with freedom and justice and opportunity for all, help us to be faithful to it. Beneath our diversities let us find unity. In issues that divide us, let there be no deep dissensions. Help us to love the rights of others as dearly as we do our own. In our debates, let truth be honored; and may the causes that we serve be fruitful to the common good. ☞ Save us, O God, from a love of country that becomes idolatry: help us to remember always that we are a part of all mankind. Open our hearts to the needs of backward nations, and may oppression and injustice move us to indignation wherever they occur. Help us to resist all forms of tyranny, including the tyranny of avarice and greed. Let us not be prosperous by impoverishing other peoples; let our concern for their necessity be equal to our own. ☞ Kindle within us, as in all men everywhere, the love of peace, and make us such people as can walk the paths of peace: hastening the day when war shall be no more, and the peoples of the earth shall draw together in the great, united family of man.

☞ O GOD of men and nations, we are grateful this day for our surpassing heritage: for all those of former times by whose labors and whose sacrifices we have been made free; whose courage in the time of testing makes us ashamed of our fears. Make us worthy, O God, of what has been bestowed upon us, that with faithfulness and fortitude, we who now must bear the burdens may go boldly forward, honoring in the present all that is precious from the past, and keeping bright the promise of the future.

☞ GIVE us to remember, O God, when we venerate the fathers of our country, that they were flesh and blood even as we are, subject to its infirmities, heir to its frailties, assailed by its doubts and beset by its fears. Yet, by their faithfulness they won the victory. They, too, were tempted to seek ease before duty, to turn away from the hard task, to postpone into the future the justice waiting to be done. But by their constancy they gained the mastery, and their triumph is the glory of our heritage. Help us, O God, that they be to us not heroes only but examples; and be Thou with us while we walk in their path.

THANKSGIVING

☞ O GOD who hast given us this good land for our inheritance, deepen our gratitude this day that so much is bestowed upon us. For the fruitfulness of the earth yielding its increase, for the beauty of hills and valleys, fields and woodlands, lakes and mountains, for wide rivers carrying their commerce to the oceans — for all, O God, that makes our country beautiful and great, we thank Thee.

☞ Yet, more than this we thank Thee for the heritage our fathers have bestowed upon us, with liberty and justice and the sacredness of human rights. We are grateful for this liberty wherewith we worship, none able to forbid us, and for minds unhindered as they seek the truth; for prophets, also, and exemplars, who were faithful to the vision, calling us to build a new and better world.

☞ Help us to remember, O God, that from those to whom much has been given, much is expected: remind us of our mission to mankind. Restore to our eyes the brightness of our early promise, and to our hearts our duty to the world.

Raise us up, O God, a nation dedicated to Thy purpose, until liberty and justice have everywhere prevailed.

☞ O GOD, when we thank Thee for what is given to us and not to others, let us remember to pray softly, for there will be many who overhear. Let conscience search our gratitude! This bounty did not come to us because, beyond the rest of men, we were deserving. O God of Truth, rebuke us! Until the needy multitudes press in upon our prayers. These are our brothers! We are one family. O God to whom we bring our gratitude, help us to remember the many who will overhear!

CHRISTMAS

☞ O GOD, we thank Thee that at the darkest time of the year there comes to us the brightest festival. Let the gladness of its faith and the joy of its promise be warm within us! ☞ Let us believe its hope: that sometime there shall be a world in which man's inhumanity to man is ended: a world of goodwill from which all cruelty is gone: a world in which the prophecies have found fulfillment, in which nations are at peace and hatred and strife are known no more. A world in which children's faces are bright like the face of the Christ-child, and all harshness and bitterness are banished, and love and gentleness have everywhere prevailed. ☞ Let the darkness of our skies be cloven! Let the angel of this hope appear! Let the song be sung to our waiting hearts, the song that is sung by the heavenly host, and let earth join in the chorus!

☞ MAY the spirit of Jesus be born in our hearts this day, that his truth may direct us, his love possess us.

☞ THE centuries have come and gone, generations have passed, and still the prophecy is not fulfilled. When shall it be, O God, that the wilderness shall blossom as the rose, and the rough places be made plain, and Thy glory shine upon us? When shall the time come, the time that was promised, when swords shall be turned into plough-shares and spears into pruning-hooks? When shall the strife be ended and Thy reign of love appear? O God, renew our hope, make quiet our fears! By the joy and blessedness of this time apart, revive our spirits. May the dayspring from on high visit us, to bring light to our darkness, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

☞ LET no ungenerous thought be in our minds today, no intent that is hurtful to another, no purpose that has harm in it. Touch us, O God, with the sweet simplicity of Christmas joy, and may its gentleness and lovingkindness fill our hearts.

☞ O GOD of all hope and prophecy, through whom the promise is renewed, make confident our faith and trust, and set our hearts to singing. Amen.

V

THE CALL OF CONSCIENCE

☞ O GOD, who hast breathed Thy life into our minds and Thy strength into our spirits, be with us when we judge ourselves and in the hour of new resolve.

☞ HOW CAN we come to Thee, O God, with hearts that we have closed to one another? We bow our heads in shame, and wonder at our own perversity. ☞ O Holy One, remind us! We are Thy children, all, each living out the briefness of his days between the daylight and the dark. Brothers in this, and lighted by the same precarious flame, how does it happen that we shut our hearts to one another? How foolish are these vanities, these walls of prejudice, this empty pride! ☞ O patient God, take pity on us! Thou who hast breathed into us the one breath of our common life, breathe yet again and deeper, and bring us to our souls' awakening!

☞ O GOD, we have prayed so long for faith without courage, for peace without striving, for solace without righteousness, and in our flight from life have fled from Thee. ☞ Now, we realize how impossible have been the things for which we asked. How can we have Thy presence and reject Thy truth? Or seek Thy comfort and refuse to serve Thee? How can we love Thee in Thine unseen temple and not love Thee in our fellow-men? ☞ We have turned away, O God, from what was calling to us, imploring Thee to save us from the need to do Thy will. We craved protection. We wanted to be shielded from reality. ☞ O Thou to whom we prayed for shelter, and there was none, teach us now to pray a braver prayer.

☞ O GOD to whom we pray for truth, be with us in our trembling lest we find it. We fear its light; our lives are full of shadows: what shall we do for shelter when we stand before the brightness of the truth? We do not want, O God, the truth that troubles us and seeks to save us; we look for truth that brings us safety, comfort and repose. We want to know that Thou art God and that our lives are in Thy care. We do not want the truth that tells us of a world of human wretchedness, with wrongs to be set right and justice calling us to serve it. For if we see this truth, we must admit our own betrayals: our callousness and cowardice, our evasions and our love of ease. ☞ We do not seek at all the truth of conscience. We want Thee in Thy tenderness, Thy lovingkindness, Thy compassion, an indulgent Heavenly Father with unwearied forgiveness. What shall we do, O Spirit of the Holy and the Highest? What shall we do to be saved?

☞ How LONG must it be, O God—for our years grow shorter — before we are ready for our duty? All about us are the miseries of man's injustice and oppression: when shall we be one with the destitute, the dispossessed, opening our hearts to the downcast and the weary? These are our brethren, flesh of our flesh, bearing Thine image and breathing Thy breath within them. These are our fellow-pilgrims, one with us in hope and yearning. O God, when we pray for a better world, joyous and peaceful, with all its banners bright, help us to see that we ourselves must bring this world to pass, and take us to where our work is waiting for us.

☞ O GOD, from whom we seek concealment of our treason and shelter for our lies, teach us that conscience gives no quarter, and why it cannot; and that the truth we banish leaves us empty of all meaning; and that the good we would not love returns to break our hearts.

☞ HELP us to see, O God, how much alike are the conflicts in the world and the conflicts in ourselves. The pride of nations is like our own pride, the vanity of rulers is our own vanity, written large. What greed is there that disfigures humankind that is not the same greed that eats out the soul of each of us? What lust of power, what aggression against the lives of others, what callousness, what empty boast of a superior race, what deceitfulness, what hypocrisy — what of any of these evils is there in a nation that there is not in a man? ☞ How can the world make peace, O God, when there is no peace in the hearts of its people? Teach us, O Thou who art in us to save us, that we have no strength to win the conflicts in the world until we have won the conflicts that are undecided in ourselves.

☞ SAVE us, O God, from prayers that are too fluent and from softly spoken insincerities. Help us to beware of language which in its soothing beauty hides the truth, and especially the truth about ourselves. When the tranquilizing word is spoken, give us to search out its inner meaning, lest we still the voice of conscience, thinking thus to quieten our unrest. Remind us how brittle is the shelter that we build about ourselves with comfortable phrases: show us how vain, at last, are all our self-deceiving words. Give us to know that the path to peace is guarded by the flaming sword of truth, and that its guide is righteousness. And let us not forget that all pretense is unavailing when we talk with Thee.

☞ BRING us closer, O God, to the meaning of life, and especially to the meaning of our own. Help us to be true, not to the conformities but to our inner selves; to say to our hearts, each of us for himself: I will speak the truth without fear because I am a free soul, breathing the breath of God; I will stand for justice, no matter how my actions are construed, because justice is the flame that burns within the light of conscience and must be my guide; I will love the cause of human welfare, the better life for all mankind, the sacred hope of brotherhood, because this is life's meaning whispered in the spirit's loneliness, the meaning that redeems our emptiness, the love of man that lifts us to the love of God.

☞ O GOD, give us sympathies too strong to tolerate injustice, a love too true to be lenient with evil; yet, let there be no malice in us, nor any bitterness nor rancor; and may we blend with charity the blame we cast on others, saving the sharpest thrusts of conscience for ourselves.

☞ HELP us, O God, never to seek the forgiveness which would destroy us: absolve us from nothing until there is nothing from which we need to be absolved.

☞ BE WITH us, O God, when we think of the wrongs we have done to other people: lest, hating ourselves for our evil-doing, we turn our hatred outward on to them. Help us to forgive ourselves, acknowledging that we are no better than we are; and then help us to believe that we can be better.

☞ BE WITH us, O God, in the quiet self-knowledge that each of us holds in his heart. What we find there that should be rebuked, by Thy spirit, give us boldness to rebuke it; what there is that we would be better without, help us to dissolve it away. And what there is of higher purpose, help us to see it plainly and to build upon it, that the best within us may come to rule our lives, until we live as we really want to live and our deeds are the answer to our prayers.

☞ FROM the wrongs we do not want to know as wrongs, unfetter us, O God, and save us.

☞ O GOD, while the shame of what we are is still upon us, touch us with the hope of our becoming. Amen.

VI

THE DARKENED HOURS

☞ REMIND us, O God, that all the darkness in the world has never yet put out a light.

☞ Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O God! And I know not if there was any to hear me. I have cried out in my grief, and there was none to give me a sign. Yet must I speak Thy name, for there is none other that can comfort me. My sorrows have overwhelmed me. The songs that I sang in a former time return to mock me. The gladness that I knew is gone, and day by day, my heart is heavy within me. I remember in the nighttime the joy of my youth and it is become a bitterness unto me. All that was mine, in which my soul rejoiced, is stricken from me in a moment of time. I am as though I were dead within me. ☞ And yet, O God, must I speak Thy name. For I have known Thee. In my grief I cannot find Thee, but I call upon Thee. For still there remains to me a little strength. And I will wait, O God, looking towards the morrow.

☞ HELP me to remember, O God of mercy and compassion, how many have known the darkness of this valley as I do now, and that their grief, like mine, was bleak and lonely. They, too, believed that hope was gone, and that their sorrows were beyond all healing. And yet the darkness passed; the bitterness at last was gone. Help me, O God, to live in faith from day to day: help Thou mine unbelief! O God, be near me!

☞ THE love I can no longer give to my beloved, help me, O God, to give to those who need it. Save me from frozenness of heart! Make my compassion deeper, my sympathy wider. Melt away my bitterness and let my sorrow teach me to be gentle. If so much that is precious can so soon be lost, let me cherish what remains; and let me be the nature of things precious in the lives of others.

☞ WHEN there is nothing to guide me in the present, help me, O God, to be guided by the insights of the past. Let not bereavement blind me to what is good and lovely still: let me see it through my tears. Until again I see it plainly.

☞ O GOD, I am a stranger with Thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were before me; behold, my life is as a candle in the nighttime, a lamp that is lighted in the dark. But Thou, O God, Thou knowest my way; the darkness and the light are both alike to Thee. Lead me, O God, in a plain path; guide Thou my steps and go before me.

☞ WHATEVER we have known and loved is ours while life shall last. Help us to see, O God, that what we love becomes a part of us, interfused with our lives, blended with mind and memory, joined to our souls. Strengthen us in resolve that the good we knew in those who have passed from us shall live on in ourselves and be passed from one generation to another, immortal both with God and men.

☞ WHEN we do not know and cannot see, help us, O Eternal, to put our trust in Thee. Even in this life, all about us and within us there is mystery. Yet the mystery shines, and in its light we see the beautiful and good. Help us to believe that it is not otherwise beyond the limit of our sight: that beauty endures, that goodness reigns, that God's other name is Love.

☞ WHEN faith burns low and darkness is all about us, help us, O God, to remember Jesus in his night of anguish. What was there that could give him hope? Death lay before him and he could not see beyond it. Could he trust his faith? The faith that battled now so desperately with his doubt? The faith that he had found while walking on the sunlit hills of Galilee, and in the wilderness, and as he went about among his fellow-men, and in the nighttime and its loneliness beneath the stars: this faith that now had turned to bloody sweat that stung his eyes while his betrayers came to take him—could he trust it still? He did, O God! And his triumph is a lighted path forever through the darkness of man's doubt, for doubt had not defeated him. ☞ So shall it be, O God, in conflicts endless, until the warfare is accomplished and the soul of man has fought its way to victory. Help us to believe it! Strengthen, O God, our hope and trust, that in the hour of doubt and grief we may be faithful, and in the time of testing, carry triumph in our hearts.

☞ WHEN the shattered pieces of our cherished plans lie all about us and we lose our faith in Thee, remind us, O Spirit Holy, that so much of God broke through the ruined plans of Jesus that two thousand years have seen no fading of its light.

☞ O GOD, when dreams dissolve in bleak awakenings, give us to dream braver dreams.

☞ WHAT we see when our vision is clearest, help us, O God, to follow when the path grows dim.

☞ O GOD who hast given us the vision of a world made beautiful and good, be with us as we seek once more the faith that makes our dreams come true. When it seems to us that all before is dark, give us to remember that so it seemed to many who went before us. When mistrust and doubt are upon us and we are battling bleakly with despair, let us know that the great and good of every time have had to find their way, as we must, by their courage and in confidence and trust. Help us, O God, to keep close company with their spirits.

☞ SHOW us, O God, that when the outer world grows dark with doubt, it can still be lighted by the inner world of faith and hope, and let us never forsake the promise.

☞ HELP us, O Holy Spirit, to pursue the thoughts that begin with doubt and fear until they end in prayer.

☞ LEAD us, O God, to see a way where there is no path, give us to hear music when our own songs cease; and when the warm touch of life forsakes us and our courage melts away, may we stumble through the darkness unto Thee. Amen.

VII

MOMENTS AND MEDITATIONS

☞ O GOD, we stand in our own shadows, hands upon our eyes, and we say to our hearts, How dark it is! Yet everywhere about us there is light.

☞ GIVE us grace, O God, to be grateful sometimes for the things we take for granted, the common courtesies of life and the kindness that is shown us. When we complain that we are carrying heavy burdens, let us see that others share them, often carrying the greater part of the load. Make us thankful that our friends are patient with us and take time to understand us; and that there are those who love us even when we give them very little in return. Help us to see how much has come to us — and still comes — that we have never deserved. By the remembrance of these things, melt away the coldness of our hearts, and draw us close to one another and to Thee.

☞ LET us not look upon the morning of a new day, O God, and not be thankful. Let there be something of the morning in our hearts. Not all our pilgrimage is in the darkness. The night ends, the day breaks as with creation's brightness, and the song of the morning stars is sung again as in the dawning of the world.

☞ LET us notice sometimes, O God, how much alike we are, one to another. Let us see that what we despise in some one else is often what we will not look at in ourselves. Teach us that wisdom begins with humility, and that we are not humble until we see that there are other people who are better than we are, and until we doubt sincerely that there are many who are worse.

☞ WHEN we try to make the little great, and reduce the great to littleness, take pity on us, O God, and frustrate us.

☞ O GOD, when we want to do only what costs us nothing, show us how great a cost it is when the nothingness of what we do comes back, and nothingness is all we have within us.

☞ O GOD, from whom we ask so much and in our hearts expect so little, show us that most of what we need is ours already if only we would take it.

☞ O THOU who art merciful, give us compassion for one another's weaknesses, knowing how often we ourselves shall need compassion. The gentleness we desire from others, let us cultivate in our own demeanor, and let us remember that what we hope to find in them, they may be looking for in us.

☞ WHEN we think we have believed in vain, O God, let us remember how often faith must find what it seeks by finding the power to create it.

☞ TEACH us, O God, that we cannot lose our fears until we deserve to lose them, or find faith until we are ready to live by it, or be strong in courage until we have begun to do the things of which we are afraid.

☞ REMIND us often, O God, how much of our lives we are not living.

☞ O SPIRIT ETERNAL, who dwellest with us, apart from whom we could know no good desire, no outreach of our thought beyond ourselves, no discontent with what is not enough, help us in the hour of doubt to know what these things mean. Without Thee, O God, we could not commune with our own spirits, and there would be no prayer in our hearts. ☞ Teach us, then, Thou who hast given us needs so great, how close we are to what we look for — and take the dimness of our sight away.

☞ SOMETIMES, O God, our hearts do know themselves, and we come closer to life's meaning. Give us to prize these hours of insight: and grant us hearts that remember.

☞ THE thoughts of our hearts, O God, are hardly more than shadows cast by the brightness of Thy light. Yet, because of them we know the light is there.

☞ O GOD, when our beliefs falter, speak to us through our doubts. Beliefs come and go. They belong to the moment; they are shaped by the age that creates them. But doubt is the child of a deeper faith, a trust in truth, a faith that knows no times nor seasons. Help us to search within our doubts until we find this faith and learn at last that though the very stars should wander, there is that within us which need never lose its way.

☞ TEACH us, O God, that we shall never rise higher than our faith and courage — and that we need never fall below them.

☞ WHEN we dream dreams, O God, that the wilderness shall blossom like the rose, be with us in our dreaming: and then put our hands to the plough.

☞ SHOW us yet once again, O patient God, that we cannot know the truth that makes men free until we cease to love our bondage more than liberty.

☞ O GOD whom men have called the unknowable, whom they have sought in unfamiliar ways of thought and have come back empty-handed, let us see how much Thou art the God of common things and of every day experience, the God who is near and not afar off. For surely, Thou art not only the end of the quest but the beginning, not the reward of life's pilgrimage alone but its companion hope. Help us, if we cannot see Thee in the splendor of the spheres to see Thee in the miracle of every flower that grows, and when we need the strength and solace of Thy love, let us seek it in one another.

☞ O THOU whom we fear we know not, and yet without whom we could know nought else, teach us how truly we know Thee when the true, the good and the beautiful are knocking on the doors of our hearts.

☞ O GOD, when we must perform tasks that we do not want to perform, and there is no escape from it, help us to perform them without complaining.

☞ WE COMMUNE too much, O God, with what defeats us. We brood over our failures until failure takes possession of our hearts. Help us to see the good that we have done and to be encouraged by it. Help us to see the good we might have done and to be drawn towards it. Help us to try once more to do the best we can, and keep us hopeful even when we are discontented with it.

☞ O GOD of the loving heart, who cannot lessen or relinquish whatever asks for human brotherhood, how long must it be before we have learned that our reluctance to love one another is robbing our lives of a fuller knowledge of Thee?

☞ LEAD us to know, O God, that life was always the same brave journey to those who were willing for it. A journey into the unknown and uncertain. But with a growing sense of power, a hardihood against the thrusts of fortune, a victory over fear. And always for those who pushed the journey far enough, the songs that the heart sings of the faith that warms it: songs that no one really hears until his own heart learns to sing them.

✚ FORGIVE us, O God, that when we pray we use so many words. For what is it to pray but to open our hearts? What is it to come before Thee but to remember that Thou art there? Yet, because words are shaped upon our lips, our spirits deepen their awareness, and although our utterance cannot voice the things we feel, we feel them more intensely. And when the words we speak at last are ended, the prayer continues in our hearts.

✚ BY THE truth we have dimmed and are able to dim no more, O God, persuade us; and by the love we have quenched and robbed our hearts in quenching, save us.

✚ O GOD whom we try again and again to make into our own image, make us more willing to be made in Thine.

✚ WHEN we close our eyes to truth, O God, fearing it as a blinding light, remind us that we cannot shut it out; for truth comes not in light alone: but as a still, small voice.

✚ O GOD of whom we ask so much, help us to listen sometimes for what Thou dost ask of us.

✚ O GOD, though yesterday is gone, and tomorrow is yet a long way off, even today there is fullness of life for those who are ready to receive it.

✚ EVEN if we have to wait for faith and hope, open our lives, O God, even now, to love. Amen.

THE LANGUAGE OF THE HEART

Powell Davies prepared originally for the Methodist ministry at Richmond College, London, but after a period in the Episcopal Methodist Church of America he became, in 1944, minister of the Unitarian Church of All Souls, Washington, DC. For some fifteen years until his death he exercised a ministry which is already legendary in American Unitarian Universalism, for from his inspiring leadership there spread out a host of Unitarian churches and fellowships in and around Washington.

The sincerity, depth and striking challenge of this book of prayers (published originally in 1956) witnesses not only to the vision of a great Christian but to the relevance of a liberal faith for men and women of religious sensitivity in the maelstrom of our present world.

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