

Family Prayer.

The blessedness of public worship is in its sense of union and fellowship, opening the soul to wider relations and sympathies than those of home and daily life.

The blessedness of private prayer is in its personal and individual character, in the sense of the soul alone, face to face, with God.

The blessedness of family prayer is in its consecration of the Christian household to the daily service of God. It is a continual repetition of the resolve, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Surely it is a good thing thus to link together in a spiritual act those whom God's providence has most closely linked together in the relationship of daily life. These relationships have their duties, and among these may we not reckon that of a care for each other's souls? Surely the heads of households will have an account to give of the way in which they have shown their care for the souls of those dwelling under their roof. It is not much they can do, perhaps. But they can do this. At least most can. Of course there is no rule to be laid down for all. There may be households where family prayer is really impossible. But where there are children, and more still where there are servants, it is not much to ask on their behalf that they may be gathered together twice, if possible, but at least once, in the day, for family worship. I have often heard those who have lived in service speak with thankfulness of the privilege of daily family prayer, and I have heard others speak with sorrow and surprise of its neglect in houses in which they have lived. Surely the practice does wonderfully sanctify and hallow the daily family life. Where family prayer might be, but is not, there is truly nothing to mark the household as a Christian one at all. It might be heathen for all that appears.

Why is it not more universal? There is plenty to be said for it, and nothing against it—at least nothing that, I think, you would not be ashamed to say. Let me just touch once more on that reason (if we can call it reason) which, as we say, sometimes prevails to hinder the practice of family prayer—I mean that love of honesty and truth, that hatred of the least approach to hypocrisy and unreality. This, together with natural reserve and shyness, really hinders many from adopting a practice which in their hearts they approve of. It would not be difficult to carry on the practice if it had once been established, but to begin—this is so like making a profession, so like saying, "I mean to be more religious." Now I do not want people to wear their hearts outside. I do not blame this natural reluctance to take such a step. But oh! surely it is no great profession to make. The question is a very simple one. Is it right? Then, in God's name, do it. Let all consideration be given to modesty and humility—but none to cowardice. "Only fear the Lord, and serve Him in truth with all your heart." Is it much to ask of those on whom this command is laid that they should just conquer their shyness for once, and begin a habit for which they will be very thankful as soon as it has become familiar to them?

In most households, family prayer is the only possible substitute for the Church's daily service. Of course, where the whole household can enjoy the great privilege of a daily Church service, this is a higher and better thing than family prayer. But even where some of the family can attend the Church's daily prayer, it is very rarely the case that many can do so, so that even this does not render family prayer needless.

But this thought of the Church's daily service naturally leads to the form which family prayer should take.

Let us consider, in the first place, the case of ordinary households unable to avail themselves of the Church's daily service.

We venture to think in this case it is very desirable that there should be some approach to the Church's system.

For instance, it would be well to read a portion of the Psalms, or one of the lessons of the day, or both, before kneeling down to pray.

Then the prayers may very fitly be selected from the Prayer-book, and should consist of Confession, Prayer for Pardon, the Lord's Prayer, the

Collect for the Day, any other Collects (especially, the 8rd for Morning or Evening, as the case may be), Intercession, Thanksgiving and Concluding Collect, with the Benedictory Prayer. In the morning it may suffice to say the "Lord, have mercy upon us. Christ, have mercy upon us. Lord, have mercy upon us," instead of the Confession and Prayer for Pardon. In one respect only it would seem that the Prayer-book will hardly supply all we need, namely, in the matter of intercession. The "Prayer for all Conditions of Men" will require some clauses added, or a separate form of Intercession may be used, in order to lay before the Throne of Grace the relatives and friends of the family, the parish and its ministers, and such other persons as it may be desired specially to mention. The habitual use of the Prayer-book in the family will help to make it familiar in Church, and its pure and chastened language will become dearer the more it becomes familiar.

Many prefer forms of prayer not taken from the Prayer-book, and, where some members of the family attend Church daily, such will be best. But we believe that prayers divided into the several acts of worship, as in many books they are, will always be found more instructive and helpful than those which provide one long unbroken prayer for each occasion.

It is, we believe, a truth which cannot be denied, that the healthiness and purity of a country depends upon the healthiness and purity of its domestic life. Oh! that the domestic life of our land were more hallowed and ennobled by the blessed influence of religion! Oh! that more of our people would honestly and manfully resolve, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

The Epiphany, or the Manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles.

On the twelfth day after Christmas the Church celebrates the joyous Feast of the Epiphany. It follows the Circumcision, that His Glory may be manifested in the flesh, as well as His humility. On this day the Church commemorates a threefold manifestation of Him: the first is that to the wise men of the East, who were the firstfruits of the Gentiles, by the guidance of a star (in the Gospel); the second, His Baptism in Jordan, on the same day in which He was manifested as the "Beloved Son of God" (second morning lesson); and the third, the miracle of Cana in Galilee, when He changed water into wine (second evening lesson). But the adoration of the Magi is the chief subject of this day in the western Church.

The 60th chapter of Isaiah should be read on this day in every place, or everywhere, as it always has been throughout Christendom.

The Brevity of Life.

Life is very critical. Any word may be our last. Any farewell, even amid glee and merriment, may be for ever. If this truth were but burned into our consciousness, if it ruled as a deep conviction and real power in our lives, would it not give a new meaning to our human relationships? Would it not make us far more tender than we sometimes are? Would it not oftentimes put a rein upon our rash and impetuous speech? Would we carry in our hearts the miserable suspicions and jealousies that now so often embitter the fountains of our lives? Would we be so impatient of the faults of others? Would we allow trivial misunderstandings to build up a wall between us and those who ought to stand very close to us? Would we keep alive petty quarrels, year after year, which a manly word any day would compose? Would we pass old friends or neighbours in the street without recognition, because of some real or fancied slight, some wounding of pride, or some ancient grudge? Or would we be so chary of kind words or commendations, our sympathy, our comfort, when weary hearts all about us are breaking for just such expressions of interest or appreciation as we have in our power to give?

Church Terms Explained.

Vulgate.—The Latin translation of the Bible in common use.

Wafer Bread.—Unleavened bread which is authorized to be used at the Holy Eucharist.

Bread, in a wafer form, because always ready for use and never crumbling, is used in the celebration of the Holy Communion, chiefly for the greater convenience of the priest who ministers, and of the faithful who communicate. It may also be said to pertain to reverence, as more separate from common use.

But while this form leads to greater safety in administration, and therefore is preferable, yet common bread of best quality is proper and allowed by the English Church; the essence of the Sacrament being in no wise effected by the use of either leavened or unleavened bread. The Catholic Church sanctions both.

The New Life.

Christ risen from death, dying no more, is the model of our new life in grace. I do not mean that absolute sinlessness is attainable by any Christian here. But at least faithfulness in our intentions, avoidance of known sources of danger, escape from presumptuous sins—innocence, as the Psalmist puts it, of the great offence—these things are possible, and indeed are necessary. Those lives which are made up of alternating recovery and relapse, even lives lived, as it were, with one foot in the grave, without anything like a strong vitality, with their feeble prayers, with their half-indulged inclinations, with their weaknesses which may be physical, but which a really regenerate will should at once away with; men risen from the dead, yet without any seeming promise of endurance in life—what would St. Paul say to these? "Christ," he would say, "being raised from the dead, dieth no more." Just as He left His tomb once for all, so should the soul, once risen, be dead indeed unto sin. There must be no hovering about the sepulchre, no treasuring the grave-clothes, no secret hankering after the scent and atmosphere of the guilty past. Cling to the risen Saviour. Cling to Him by entreaties which twine themselves round His sacred person. Cling to Him by sacraments, the revealed points of contact with His strengthening manhood. Cling to Him by obedience and by works of mercy, through which, He tells us Himself, we abide in His love. And then, not in your own strength, but in His, "likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."—H. P. Liddon.

—Whether the change is for the better or the worse, Christmas is not what it once was. In the "merry" old days, the country folk especially used to look forward to it all the year round. They made it last as long as they could, for, though literally Christmas closed at Twelfth Night, no housewife dared to take down her decorations till Candlemas (the second of February). Neighbours, yeomen, peasantry would all flock to the squire's hospitable mansion; the Christmas log, dragged in with songs and shouting, blazed on the hearth; sheep, or even oxen, were roasted and brought in whole; the jolly wassail cup passed from hand to hand. Mummers and maskers came to enhance the mirth, and the old hall rang with the merry clatter and laughter.

"To shorten winter's sadness,
See where the nymphs with gladness,
Disguised all are coming,
Right wantonly a-mumming."

Once a year all men seemed to meet on a footing. Even the tramp and beggar was made welcome—if not to the banqueting hall, yet to the warm, cheerful kitchen. It kept alive the feeling of good-fellowship; it drowned any bitterness that might exist between class and class. This kindness has always blessed our social life, and made England, even in her worst days, a land of comparative content and peace. Much of this we owe to our good old Christmases. May the same kind spirit be ever with us! If Christmas changes its face, yet may it be ever a reminder of charity, generosity, benevolence.