

# THE COLONIAL CHURCHMAN

"BUILT UPON THE FOUNDATION OF THE APOSTLES AND PROPHETS, JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF BEING THE CHIEF CORNER STONE. . . . . Eph. 2 c. 20 v.

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## PASTORAL CONVERSATIONS.

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### THE COMMON PRAYER.

There are but few things connected with the ritual of our Church that appear to be less attended to than the reasons or arguments on which the practice of reading public prayers is founded. In some instances this is true of those who admire and spiritually profit by these prayers: but more especially, is it the case with dissenters, who consider the practice in question to be, not only unscriptural, but even directly opposed to every sentiment of devotion and true piety. The other day I had an opportunity of perceiving how deeply this prejudice—for I can call it nothing else—influences the conduct and religious opinions of some who think themselves shrewd and rational people, in a short conversation with a respectable acquaintance who is a dissenter.

Riding along the road, he came up with me and said—

'Good day, Parson.'

'Good day, Mr. M. I hope I see you well to-day?'

'Quite well, thank you.' After a pause I asked him—

'Excuse me, Mr. M. but how is it that I never see you at Church now? You used to come occasionally, although you belong, as I understand, to another denomination.'

'It is true I used to go sometimes. But I often thought that I had as well stay away.'

'I am very sorry to hear you say so. May I ask the reason?'

'It is nothing against you, Sir.'

'I should have no objection to your coming, but what is it? Although I have not the satisfaction of being your pastor, Mr. M. yet believe me I should be greatly pleased if you were to deal plainly with me in these matters. Perhaps mutual confidence may lead to explanations that will smooth down, if not entirely remove, your scruples.'

'Well then, I will be plain with you, Sir. The principal reason that I do not frequent your Church oftener, is simply this: your prayers, being read, are too formal and ceremonious for me: they do not give full scope to the spirit of prayer.'

'Any thing else?'

'They cramp and keep down the devout aspirations of the heart—are cold, and without energy enough to keep one from sleeping. The sermon I like well enough: only I think it would sound better without the paper.'

'Then you prefer, Mr. M. extempore praying, and extempore preaching.'

'Yes, I do, infinitely.'

'You have your reasons no doubt for the choice you have made, and for the opinions you entertain. But has it ever occurred to you that I may have reasons for my opinions likewise?'

'Perhaps so—certainly.'

'Well then. If you are in no particular hurry, and wish to hear some of them, I will tell you why the Church Clergy read their prayers.'

'I am always willing to be instructed, Sir.'

'Well listen. First of all, the practice of reading prayers has prevailed in the Church from the earliest times: even at the present day it prevails more extensively and universally than any other. The worshippers of Bramah, the Mahometans, the Jews, the leading denominations among christians—all have their written prayers, or Prayer Books—'

'Are you sure of that?'

'Perfectly certain: but don't interrupt me if you please, till I bring my argument to a point. The different worshippers just specified have their prayer books. Now I dare say that you have heard a preacher occasionally urge the universal consent and opinion of mankind against the atheists, as a proof

of the existence of a Deity: if this argument then be conclusive, when applied to the first and greatest article of religion, I mean the existence of God, it cannot surely be less so with respect to the best and fittest way of worshipping him. I am of opinion therefore that the general consent of mankind is in favour of a set form of prayer.'

'Well: I don't know but it is.'

'Besides: our Lord himself, whilst in the flesh commanded—actually commanded—his disciples to use a form of prayer. For I suppose you will admit that the Lord's prayer, as it is commonly called is not only a pattern for prayer, but is in itself a most comprehensive prayer.'

'I do admit that: but I see no reason for repeating it so often as you do.'

'Have patience and you shall hear why we do so. At present permit me to ask, if you have ever thought of the great responsibility which a preacher takes upon himself by praying extempore?'

'No: I cannot say that I have.'

'And yet, Mr. M.' is a remarkable circumstance. I will explain it in a familiar way. Should the ablest member of our House of Assembly propose to offer our address to her Majesty, in the name of the House, without communicating it to the other members, the impropriety of such a proceeding would be immediately perceived. Supposing he should address them in the following words—'Pray, Gentlemen, give yourselves no trouble about the matter, I will address her Majesty for you. I know very well what you want, and you will have nothing to do but to approve of what I shall say; and next year you will perhaps have an opportunity of ascertaining whether you like it or not.' Would the other members, think you, accept of the kind offer of their talented associate?'

'No: I am very certain, Parson, they would do no such thing.'

'I agree with you. For their address of last session was amended, and re-amended, scratched, and patched in a manner which did infinite credit to their industry, before they could agree about it. Every person present seemed to have something to say in the matter; and even a great many persons who were not present thought they could improve it, if they had an opportunity—'

'Ah! you may well say that Sir.'

'We are all very scrupulous you see about any thing we have to address to her Majesty. And yet the addresses or petitions which many denominations of Christians offer from week to week to One, whose Majesty is infinite, are left to the care or judgment of any one, who chooses to undertake the trouble of uttering them extempore in a public congregation. They never trouble themselves much about the matter. Such is the inconsistency of human nature.'

'I did not think you would come upon me with that side-wind, Parson.'

'Whatever side the wind blows from, Mr. M. it will fill the sails, and a seaman likes it best on the quarter: but the reasoning is good and correct, you may depend upon it.'

'It appears to be so.'

'Hence, you perceive the necessity of knowing before-hand what the minister is going to address to the Father of Spirits in our behalf. In the use of written prayers or petitions, we merely act as common sense and a correct judgment enable us to act, in the most important relations of life. We study the matter of our request, and ascertain whether we can enter heart and soul into the truth and consequence of each separate petition. And when a pe-

riusal of the form to be used satisfies us that nothing, but what is reverent, and devotional, and suited exactly to our wants as dependent creatures, is inserted, and in truth, will approach the throne of grace with more comfort, more satisfaction, and more consolation,

than he could possibly feel under other circumstances.'

'I understand.'

'It appears then from the practice and precept of our adorable Redeemer, from the universal practice of the religious world, and from analogy, that written prayers are preferable, and most suited to wants and condition of such a Being as man. I mention, you observe, of their great usefulness in cementing the bonds of union among all the members of the Church,—of the stability and permanency which they impart to the "doctrine and the testimony, or of the decency and order which they conduce to preserve in the public worship of God. The advantages must be obvious to every person of reflection.'

'Yes, I am aware the apostle has said—"Let things be done decently and in order."'

'Most certainly he has written so to the Corinthians. It follows then that if we have a form of prayer that combines a true devotional feeling, with the general expression of our various wants and requirements,—a spirit of love and reverence to our Heavenly Father with the choicest and purest diction,—we have all that appears necessary to constitute a Common Prayer. And I do think that the Liturgy comes as near to this standard as any Prayer Book in christendom. Its terms are not so general expressed as to preclude their application to individuals: and they are not so narrow or particular to render them unfit to be used in the largest congregations: and this I consider a point of high excellence.'

'But there are repetitions in it, which I must say, Parson, seem to me to be unnecessary.'

'I remember: you mentioned that before. The repetitions, as you call them, arise, not from any defect or oversight in the composition of the Prayer Book, but from the modern manner of using it. The compilers intended that the service which is now read on a Sunday morning in most churches should be divided into three parts,—the Morning Prayer, the Litany, and the Communion Service, and if each of these parts should be read at different times of the morning—say at six, nine, and eleven o'clock. But custom, which is generally the result of public convenience, has rendered it a matter of standing practice that the congregation should meet only once in the forenoon of each Lord's day. Hence the three services are thrown into one,—a circumstance which fully accounts for the repetitions you complain of.'

'Yes: it accounts for them certainly. Still I do not see the use of them.'

'You cannot surely, Mr. M. perceive any harm in them. Did not our blessed Saviour himself pray three times in the Garden of Gethsemane, using the same words? And with such an example before us can we possibly err in repeating the sacred form words which He hath taught and commanded us to use? Certainly not. And if those, who take up their prejudice against the ritual and mode of worship observed in our Church, were carefully to examine the grounds of their objection, I am very sure that the most important scruples would speedily vanish, or that they would receive much comfort and spiritual nourishment from joining in a form of Prayer, which is the guide of our language, and the admiration of the christian world.'

### GRACE AND SIN.

These two, grace and sin, are like two buckets, a well; when one is up, the other is down. The more grace thrives in the soul, the more sin dries up.—Brooks.

Wisdom prepares for the worst; but folly leaves the worst for that day when it comes.