

religious books full of most valuable and practical suggestions.

Isaac Williams' Devotional Commentary on the Gospels is probably known to most here. The words of the Lord Jesus above all other words demand our most reverent devotional study. Let us not, however, substitute any commentaries in the place of our own prayerful study of the Word. "In all labour there is profit." And we shall find that our own laborious devotional study of the Word, however discouraging at times, will surely tend to growth in the spiritual life.

There is one book of the Holy Bible which is so eminently a devotional manual that I must specially refer to it.

The Book of Psalms, which has been called the Redeemer's Prayer-book. I can hardly imagine any communicant whose desire it is to draw near to and feed upon Jesus in the Holy Communion, intentionally allowing any day to pass without reading with all thoughtful attention and most reverent care, a few verses at least from the Psalter which is so full of Christ and Christianity. Dr. Perowne, in his notes on the Psalms, has a very interesting chapter on the use of the Psalter in the church and by individuals, from the antiphonal chanting of the Psalms, in the Christian agapæ of the 2nd century, down to the late Bishop Blomfield's constant use, in his private evening devotions, of the 51st Psalm. Bishop Alexander, of Derry, in his recent Bampton lectures, "*The witness of the Psalms to Christ and Christianity*," has incidentally brought out the extreme value of the Psalter as a Manual of Devotion. In his fourth lecture he traces out the character of the Christian from the Psalter in its relation to God, to the Church and to Self. I quote only his summary. "It would be easy, taking up the image of saintliness in the Beatitudes, to show that each line has its anticipation in the Psalms. But enough has been said to indicate how strong is the witness of the Psalter to that peculiar character which is one element of Christianity. It is a character (1) as regards God—finding its joy in Him; (2) as regards the Church—using and prizeing forms and ordinances without resting in them; (3) as regard Self—combining a sense of sinfulness with a consciousness of reconciliation—full at once of a conviction of unworthiness, and of a yearning for inward purity—exhibiting gentleness, childlike humility, and all the graces of the Beatitudes."

II. THE PRAYER-BOOK.

Our Prayer-book, we all know, may be studied, (1) in reference to its *Antiquity*, i.e., its sources in ancient Liturgies and Sacramentaries; (2) or in reference to its *History*, i.e., its reformation in the sixteenth and its revisals in the seventeenth century; (3) or in reference to its *Rationale*, i.e., its devotional and practical teaching: or, turning away from these three great divisions in which the Prayer-book may be studied, it may also be most profitably studied as a *Devotional Guide and Manual*.

And I cannot but feel that it would conduce to a more manly, more English type of piety, if the Prayer-book, in place of some modern devotional manuals, which savour of Rome, was more reverently studied, more diligently followed.

I venture, therefore, to suggest a few thoughts on this subject taken mainly from a lecture of the present Dean of Chichester, Dr. Burger, on the Prayer-book as a Devotional Manual and Guide.

1. First let us ponder well and deeply over this: The Church's Method of Divine worship consists in the prayerful contemplation of her Lord. From Advent to Trinity she brings Christ before us in His first and second comings; in His Birth, and Circumcision, and Epiphanies; in His Life and Temptation and Passion; in His Death and Burial and Resurrection; in His Ascension and His sending of the Holy Comforter. From the central festival of Trinity (which gathers into one the glories of Christmas, Easter and Whitsuntide) on again to Advent, the Church brings Christ before us in His holy example and blessed teaching. The church's method of devotion, therefore, is not self-contemplation, not the analysis of our own thoughts and feelings, but the devotional survey of an external object, and that object a Divine Person, our Saviour Jesus Christ: very God as well as very man.

Christ is invariably set before us in the Church's Method of Worship. We are instructed to fasten our eyes on Him. Through Him we offer our prayers. Our creeds guard the doctrine of His Eternal Godhead and Holy Incarnation. The Te Deum and the Litany are mainly addressed to Him. In our occasional as in our regular offices, He is everywhere present, pleading, promising, sanctifying, blessing: while in the great Eucharistic rite, Jesus emphatically, is all.

2. I cannot enlarge on the great prominence given to the Holy Scripture in the Prayer Book; it must not, however, be overlooked when we regard the Prayer Book as our devotional guide. The English Church would have her children prize the Holy Scriptures.

(3.) Notice another feature in our Prayer Book—Praise quite as much, if not more than prayer is a part of Divine worship. The recitation of the creeds is clearly an act of praise, so is the use of the canticles and the Psalms; the very reading of the Scriptures, as a rehearsal throughout of God's goodness, greatness, and glory, is an ascription of praise.

These three characteristics of the Prayer Book are specially to be noticed when we regard it as one of Devotional Manuals and Guides. I will now add a few remarks to show how in various ways the Prayer Book, if we so desire it, may guide and assist in our private devotions.

(1) Surely even in private the orderly succession of the Christian seasons should not be overlooked. "We may reasonably seek to associate ourselves with the whole body of the faithful, to keep ourselves in harmony with the church throughout the world; by collect, by psalm, or by the suggestive guidance of some single text of scripture, we should surely aim at setting before ourselves the season of the sacred year, the special aspect under which we are invited to contemplate our Lord.

(2.) May we not seek to be kept in a kind of weekly harmony with the history of our Redemption? How could a Christian more fittingly begin his devotions for the Lord's Day than by using the Anthem for Easter Day, followed by the Collects for Easter and Whit-Sunday? On Wednesday the day of our Lord's betrayal, the first Collect for Good Friday might be used. On Thursday the Collect for Ascension Day. On Friday the Collect for the Sunday next before Easter. On Saturday the Collect for Easter Even. On each day the Collect for the preceding Sunday, with the addition of the Collects for particular saints days as they occur.

(3.) If we need a form of confession, might not one of the three or four in the Prayer Book be used, or form its basis at least. The Lord's Prayer will follow, and some suitable ones from the numerous collects in that treasury of devotion. Many more than 100 are in the Prayer Book, and some, like that for unity, hidden away in unlooked for quarters.

(4.) When we have to devise prayers of our own we shall be greatly helped by first having made the prayers of the Prayer Book our study. They will teach us *what* to ask, and *how* to ask it. I have not time for illustration.

(5.) Words of praise should never, the Prayer Book shows, be absent from our devotions, even if we only recite the Gloria Patri, or some form of Doxology, or some psalm of praise.

One hint more which will serve to connect together in our devotions, the Holy Bible and the Prayer Book.

(6.) The latter contains what is to us an authoritative interpretation of the former. The interpretations of texts of Scripture scattered up and down the pages of the Prayer Book are very numerous. One striking instance, the sacramental interpretation of our Lord's great discourse in St. John vi. in the exhortation in the Communion office. But beyond this interpretation of scattered texts, the teaching of the Church of England in her regular and occasional offices, and in her articles of religion, on every doctrine of prime importance is a treasure which no faithful son of the Church can afford to overlook.

I have left myself but little time to touch on the other two devotional books which I have mentioned. I will be as brief as possible.

III. THE IMITATION OF CHRIST, by St. Thomas a Kempis.

On the authorship of this well known book of

devotion, see Canon Farrar's exhaustive lecture on this subject. Hundreds of thousands of humble-minded Christians both in our own and other branches of the Church Catholic have prized it; thousands probably are at this day reading a small paragraph of it regularly in their daily devotions. To some, probably it is not an attractive book. Some perhaps may be repelled by its asceticism. It is not indeed without grave defects—two of which I will mention—(1.) The first is the spirit of sadness that pervades the book. The writer appears to know nothing of the music of the "Lætatus sum" of David. The sparkling joy that lights up song after song of the Psalter finds no place with Imitatio. (2.) Another and greater defect is the concentration of thought on our own personal salvation—on our own individual safety, forgetting that life is not only *worship* but also *service*—that God has entrusted to us all, the love and care of others.

Nevertheless, the book may be to us and our day pre-eminently useful for two reasons at least. First, on account of the repeated warnings it contains against the dangers which beset us in this age of ease and self-indulgence. The Imitatio, like the Bible, teaches us, that "the body must be subdued, the flesh mortified, the passions crucified, the cross taken, the race run, the battle fought," or in the words of our Master that we must *strive* to enter in.

(2.) Secondly on account of the protest it silently bears against the notion that lies at the very basis of sacerdotalism—I quote Dr. Farrar's eloquent words on this—"A Catholic, a priest, a monk, yet, as though raised far above himself, and the system which he held, and the ecclesiastical order to which he belonged, the one truth which he most absolutely realized is the *direct and immediate* access of the soul to God. . . . For it is the worst error of Rome, and one against the encroachments of which in our own church we should watch most jealously,—that it intrudes into the sacredness of the soul's individuality, that it thrusts all kinds of intermediaries between the soul and its Creator. . . . But in this book there is no interference between the soul and God, no vulgarizing of the emotions by unbaring them to human eye: no wearing of the soul upon the sleeve for daws to peck at: no human foot intruding between us and the merey seat: no dabbling of the profane hand of human confessor in the secrets of microcosm. It is an audience chamber where no ambassador is needed: it is a confessional wherein the soul confesses to and absolves itself. It sends the penitent neither to book nor formula, neither to church nor council, neither to pope nor priest, neither to saint nor angel; but, go it says, and *clasp the very Saviour's feet*."

IV. THE CHRISTIAN YEAR.—A most needful book for these restless days: for what is the keynote of this book, which has inaugurated a new era in the religious poetry of England? The sainted author has placed it on its title page: "*In quietness and in confidence shall be thy strength.*"

The *quietness of tone* which marks the book may render it unfit for the great crises of life, for raptures of joy, or agonies of sorrow: but it is this very tone that fits it for the companionship of our daily life, that causes it to grow upon our affections, and tell gradually and silently and therefore deeply upon our souls. Times of crisis in our lives are rare, mainly life is a time of steady duty, and patient endurance, and unexcited thought. The book is designed as you are aware to be used in humble subordination to the spirit and order of the Prayer Book; hence it is the *Christian year*, in its successive manifestations of the Lord Jesus, whose course the poet follows.

Can I even begin to point out to you the beauties of these soothing melodies? For those (if there are such here) who have yet to learn to prize the "Christian Year," I will not anticipate the pleasure arising from a discovery of these for yourselves. For those who prize it, it needs not that I do so. They will bear me out when I say that the older we grow, the longer we study the Christian year, the fuller of thought, and teaching, and beauty we discover it to be. Thirty years study of it, from my entrance into Oxford until now have deepened my love and reverence for the "Christian Year."

It has already done priceless spiritual service as a companion of the devout life, and it will live to