

EXTRACTS FROM MEMOIR OF DR. PAYSON.

All who are acquainted with the power andunction that characterized Dr. Payson's public prayers, will read with interest the following thoughts, penned by him, on this important subject:—

The excellence of any performance consists in its being adapted to answer the end for which it is designed. So far as it is not adapted to answer that end, it must be considered defective. The design of public prayer, considered as a part of ministerial duty, is to honour the Being to whom it is addressed, and to excite and direct the devotional feelings of his worshippers. These two objects, though distinct, are inseparably connected, and are to be attained by the same means; for it will ever be found, that that mode of performing the duty of public prayer which is best adapted to promote the honour of God, is best calculated to excite and direct the devotional feelings of the hearers. That our devotional performances may secure the attainment of these united objects, they must be the echo of a fervently pious heart guided by a judicious and enlightened mind, to the voice of God, as uttered in his works and his Word. An expression of the Psalmist will illustrate my meaning: "When thou saidst, Seek ye my face, my heart said unto Thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek." In a similar manner should our public addresses be the echo of his language to us. Our adorations and ascriptions of praise should thus respond to what he has revealed of his natural and moral perfections; our confessions to the charges which he has preferred against us, and to the punishments with which he threatens us; our petitions and intercessions, to his commands, his promises, and the description he has given of our own wants and those of our fellow-creatures; and our thanksgivings to the favours which he has bestowed upon ourselves, our countrymen and our race. When our devotional performances thus echo back the voice of God, we cannot fail to promote both his glory and the edification of our people. We then follow a guide which cannot mislead us; we express the very feelings which his language to us is designed and calculated to excite; we set our seal to the truth of his declarations, say Amen to all that he has seen fit to reveal to us, and teach our hearers to do the same. Thus, while we avoid the too common fault of *preaching* in prayer, our prayers will preach, and prove no less instructive than our sermons. We shall at the same time excite them to pray, and teach them how to pray. While we speak as the mouth of our people to God, we shall, in

an indirect but most impressive manner, be the mouth of God to our people, and set before them their duty, as respects both faith and practice, in a way least calculated to offend, and in those so *eminent* moments when the exhibition of truth is most likely to affect them.

If the preceding remarks be just, it will be easy to infer from them what are the principal faults which should be avoided by us in leading the devotions of our hearers.

In the first place, I conceive that our devotional performances are too often the language of the understanding rather than the heart. It has been observed that they should be the echo of a fervently-pious heart, guided by an enlightened understanding, to the voice of God. They too often consist almost entirely of passages of Scripture—not always judiciously chosen or well arranged—and commonplace phrases, which have been transmitted down for ages, from one generation of ministers to another, selected and put together just as we would compose a sermon or essay, while the heart is allowed no share in the performance; so that we may more properly be said to *make a prayer* than to *pray*. The consequence is, that our devotional performances are too often cold and spiritless; as the heart did not assist in composing, it disdains to aid in uttering them. They have almost as much of a form as if we made use of a liturgy; while the peculiar excellences of a liturgy are wanting. Our hearers soon become familiarized to our expressions, and not unfrequently learn to anticipate them; and, though they may possibly be instructed, their devotional feelings are not excited.

That public prayer may produce its proper and designed effects upon their hearts, it should be, if I may so express it, a kind of devout poetry. As in poetry, so in prayer, the whole subject matter should be furnished by the heart, and the understanding should be allowed only to shape and arrange the effusions of the heart in the manner best adapted to answer the end designed. From the fullness of a heart overflowing with holy affections, as from a copious fountain, we should pour forth a torrent of pious, humble, and ardently-affectionate feelings; while our understandings only shape the channel, and teach the gushing streams of devotion where to flow and when to stop. In such a prayer every pious heart among our hearers will join. They will hear a voice and utterance given to their own feelings. They will hear their own desires and emotions expressed more fully and perspicuously than they could express them themselves. Their hearts will spring forward to meet and unite with the heart of the speaker. The well of water which our Saviour assures us is in all who drink of his Spirit, will rise and burst its way through the rubbish of worldly cares