

PUBLIC WORSHIP. *A. E. H. 10*

It is necessary that the attention of the Church should be drawn to this subject. This is one of the most solemn and important duties which the Christian has to perform in this world. We all agree that there ought to be public worship, and that it should be engaged in with devout solemnity of mind and of manner. We all feel that as creatures, we ought to give homage to the Creator. It will not be disputed, that this homage consists in adoration, or the involving of his Holy Name, in the expression of our confidence in Him, in confession, petition or supplication, and thanksgiving: all this too in a public way, and on the ground of the command to worship God and to ask that we may receive, to seek that we may find, to knock that it may be opened to us. The faculties of our body are in this matter to give expression to the affections of our soul, the outward act is to be the counterpart of the inward feeling. With our lips, it is required that we audibly praise God, in the song and in the prayer. With our bodies, we are required to assume certain attitudes, such as of kneeling, standing and lifting up the hands and eyes to heaven. It may be said of public worship as it is of faith, that without works it is dead. It is only by *acts* that we can "show forth the praises of Him that hath called us." The *external* act, or the worship of the body, is as much a duty as the *internal* affection. To magnify the one at the expense of the other, is to mar the sacrifice and service of the *whole* man in the adoration of Jehovah. In stating this, let it not be supposed that we advocate the revival of ritualism in the public services of the sanctuary; any tendency of this kind we should deem it necessary to oppose with all our might. What we aim at, is the perfecting of the *rites* which we possess and have adopted in our Church fellowship on the authority of Scripture; that in short *all* things be done decently and in order.

What then is the state of our Public Worship?

As a non-liturgical Church, we have been represented by our adversaries as sadly defective in point of reverence and worship. Our services, say they, are bald and meagre, our Churches are places where men are wont to preach and not to pray. Against these charges, we urge the superior simplicity and beauty of free spontaneous prayer over that of frequent formal repetitions, and the greater adaptability of our order to all the Christian wants of the Church, compared with that of a fixed service book. We can say that we sing the inspired Psalms of David, that we pray after the manner of Jesus Christ, Apostles, Evangelists and holy men of old; and while we do pay some regard to preaching the word, we yet devote a due proportion of our Sabbath service to the *direct* worship of Jehovah. We have thus a way of worshipping our God in and through Jesus Christ our Lord, by and with the promised aid of the Holy Spirit, which we think every way sufficient to meet the requirements of Holy Scripture and to edify the Church of God.

But the question which we would now consider is not as to the propriety of our *form*, so much as to the way in which as a Church we perform that which we profess in this matter. Have we perfected our *ideal* of worship, or is there something yet to be desired in the way of improvement and reform? Does the minister perform his part to perfection, and do the people perform theirs? What is the general character of the worship in our Churches, as regards the minister on the one hand and the people on the other?

To begin with the last first, let us look at the general appearance of many of our congregations as they are engaged in the exercise of Divine Worship.

I. PUBLIC SINGING.

Our singing is the first part of our service and is especially worthy of note. In this there will scarcely ever be found any instrumental aids, such as organs, harps