

## THE PRAYER-BOOK.

BY REV. W. H. PLATT, D.D. LL.D.

We, too, sit at the feet of Jesus on the mountain side, and learn from Him how to pray. We claim that in the Lord's Prayer, as a compend of all prayers, and which our Saviour himself condensed from an old Jewish Liturgy, we are taught a liturgy by the Master himself. And in almost every other prayer, we discover, in its ancient form and date, the very spirit of simplicity of the Master's words. Many of these short prayers, called "Collects," were written from thirteen to fifteen hundred years ago, almost in the days of the Saviour's life. The *Gloria in Excelsis* is the composition of some unknown person, about the year A. D. 125 or 150. The substance of the Apostles' Creed is found in the writings of Irenæus, A. D. 180. Most of the Nicene Creed was set forth in a general council of the Church, as early as A. D. 325. The Litany, an imitation, if not a copy, of those of many centuries before, was thrown into its present shape by Archbishop Cranmer, A. D. 1544, with but slight subsequent changes.

Nor is the praise of the Prayer-book less ancient. The *Gloria in Excelsis* of the second century is not its most ancient hymn. We sing the same songs that were sung in the temple over five hundred years before Christ. In the 95th Psalm, called, from the Vulgate version, the *Venite*; in the 100th Psalm, called the *Jubilate*; in the 98th Psalm, called the *Cantate*; in the 92d Psalm, called the *Bonum est Confiteri*; in the 67th Psalm, called the *Deus Misericatur*; in the 103d Psalm, called the *Benedic anima mea*—in these Psalms, used by worshippers for over two thousand years, and sung to the Old Temple music, now called Gregorian, we take up the strains of praise to God which have sanctified and glorified the ages, and roll on forever the anthem of choral joy.

There, too, is the grand old *Te Deum*, sung at the coronation of Kings and the setting up of Empires, breaking in between what God the Father said in the Old Testament and what God the Son said in the New. For over fourteen hundred years has this sublime Creed, Sermon, and Prayer been lifted up to God as the faith of the Church.

As to the antiquity of the Prayer-book, we may further and finally say, that from the appointment of a committee by convocation in 1537 to reform public worship, to the appointment by Charles II., in 1662, of twenty-one Episcopalians and twenty-one Presbyterians to advise together as to alterations, if any, of the Prayer-book, it has been subjected to six critical revisions; thus bringing its structure and most ancient materials under the scrutiny of different minds for many centuries, and especially for one hundred and twenty-five years, making it the exponent of the struggles and triumphs of the great Reformation.

## II. ITS SCRIPTURALNESS.

But its antiquity would not commend it as meritorious and worthy of universal acceptance as a system of public worship, if it was not also most thoroughly scriptural.

Exclusive of the Thirty-nine

Articles, the Hymns, and the Psalms in metre, three-fourths of the Prayer-book are literal extracts from Scripture. These embrace all the Psalms of David, selections from the Gospels and Epistles, and verses introductory to the services. The Psalms in metre are, of course, scriptural. Our Hymns are as scriptural as those of any other volume of the kind. Our Services and Offices are either in the exact words of, or are sustained by, a most sure warrant of Scripture. For instance, the Exhortation to Confession is sustained by over thirty passages of Scripture; the Confession itself is remarkably similar in expression to portions of the seventh chapter of Romans, and is sustained by nearly sixty similar passages of Scripture; the Versicles are the fifteenth verse of the 51st Psalm; the Absolution is sustained by over twenty citations of Scripture; the Doxology or Gloria Patria by five; the *Te Deum* by fifty; the *Benedictus* is a literal quotation of the prophecy of Zacharias in the first chapter of St. Luke; the *Jubilate* is the 100th Psalm of David; the Creed is a synopsis of twenty-eight passages of Scripture; the Prayer for Peace of twelve; that for Grace of fifteen; that for the President of twenty two; and those of the Litany of over two hundred. There are Collects, Gospels, and Epistles for sixty-two Sundays, out of which to provide service for the fifty-two Sundays in the year. These sixty-two Collects are either in the exact words or are sustained by over five hundred citations of Scripture. The Communion Service has five hundred and eighty; the Baptismal Offices over three hundred; the Catechism, one hundred and twenty; Confirmation Office, fifty-three; the Marriage Service, one hundred and ninety-two; Burial Service, sixty-five, exclusive of the lesson from the Corinthians and the Psalter; the Ordinal for Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, three hundred; and the Thirty-nine Articles, eight hundred and seventy-five citations from the Bible. Thus, the scripturalness of the Prayer-book is seen in that three-fourths are extracts from Scripture, and the other one-fourth is sustained by over three thousand citations of Scripture. But this is not all.

When we remember that one leading complaint against the Romish Church was, that it withheld the Bible from the people, may we not ask, without implying any want of charity and good will to other Christians, whether there be any order of worship so protestant and scriptural as that of the Prayer-book? Look at the number of times we read the Scriptures to our people during a service! In the course of a Sunday morning service we read a lesson from the Old and one from the New Testament. We read, responsively, one or more of the Psalms of David; we read a passage from the Gospels and one from the Epistles; and also the Ten Commandments, making in all six Scripture readings. If the service be read according to the daily calendar, the Old Testament would be read to the people once, the New Testament three, and the Psalms twelve times a year.

We claim, so far as the public reading of the Bible and the praise and devotions of our service are con-

cerned, to have, most undeniably, the most scriptural worship on the face of the earth. In using none but written forms of prayer, we can take time, and time has been taken, to put them into the words, or very near the words, of Scripture. Extemporaneous prayers may or may not lie along so closely to the side of the Bible. He who utters them has no time to examine into that matter. He runs the risk oftentimes of uttering words unadvisedly with his lips, against which the wise man in Ecclesiastes v., 2, thus warns: "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God; for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth; therefore, let thy words be few."—(*Standard of the Cross*.)

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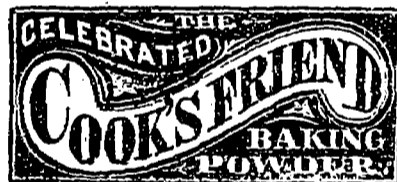
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