

stroying the good which is intended. The doctrines and articles of belief held by our Church are not as well known or understood by the majority of the laity as they should be; and it could hardly be denied that the average Romanist layman, or the average Nonconformist, would be able to give a far more succinct account of the tenets held by the religious body to which he belongs than the average Church of England layman is able to do. At the same time, the Sunday services are not the most suitable opportunities for doctrinal instruction. The congregation is composed of many diverse and differing elements, including men and women of every school of religious thought, and often those who have little or no religious belief at all. Consequently, a doctrinal sermon will have the effect of alienating those who have strong religious convictions coinciding with the opposite point of view to that from which the preacher approaches his subject, while strong meat will be offered to a large number who, being children in spiritual things, require to be fed with milk.

The clergy cannot do more wisely than to study and copy the example of the Lord Jesus Christ as set forth in His Sermon on the Mount, and His other discourses. Let every preacher determine that he will, with the Divine help, present to his hearers the fundamental truths of the Christian faith: the Incarnation, our Redemption by Christ's sacrifice, the glories of the Resurrection. The essential doctrines of the Sacraments, the Priesthood, Confirmation, and the like, should not be ignored, but should rather be brought forward as the superstructure of the Christian edifice, which can only be erected when the foundation has been laid.

2. The charge of being *doctrinaire* is levelled against many preachers. By "doctrinaire" I mean the attempt to enforce ideas and theories on special subjects without having mastered all the premises. This is a favourite error among the junior clergy when they touch upon such topics as the labour question, or the relation of science to religion. Many of us remember the incalculable harm which was wrought by the attitude of the majority of the clergy towards scientific research fifty years ago. The tendency of the present day is in the opposite direction, and certain preachers now revel in sweeping aside the belief in miracles, etc., in order to prove their liberal-mindedness.

The pulpit of the parish church is not the platform from which clerical pronouncements on such questions should be delivered. If the occasion arises when the attitude of the Church requires to be defined, some competent divine, who has made a special study of the subject, should be asked to speak. At the same time it is a matter of the utmost importance that the clergy should endeavour to grasp the bearings of every important social and scientific problem of the day; by this means they are enabled to retain and to increase their influence with the cultured and intelligent laymen with whom they are thrown in contact.

3. The third charge against the preaching of to-day is its *dullness*. I fear that we must plead guilty in this matter—at all events, in respect to the majority of sermons. The dullness may be due to one of two causes:

(a) Quality. (b) Delivery.

(a) The quality of many of the pulpit utterances in our churches is not brilliant. The language is either grandiloquent and verbose, or commonplace and full of platitudes. In both instances there is a lack of solid information, or of real substance, which is very wearying to the congregation. Frequently this defect is due, not so much to the ignorance of the preacher, as to his inexperience in the art of arranging and putting forward his facts.

(b) The *delivery* is decidedly a weak point with some of the clergy. Few people realise the enormous advantage of a soft, musical voice, and a graceful and dignified bearing in

the pulpit. Many a sermon, poor in itself, is admired and praised on account of the charm with which it is preached; while many an able and well-reasoned address is condemned, through the harshness of voice or uncountness of gesture on the part of the priest who gave it.

In thus acknowledging the weakness of many of the clergy in respect of this branch of their work, I should be sorry to appear to deny the existence among us of men unequalled in any other religious body for their eloquence and learning. Those who have heard such divines as the late Archbishop Magee, the late Dr. Liddon, the late Bishop Lightfoot, or the present Bishops of Ripon and Derry, will agree that the preaching power of the Church of England stands very high. The question we are considering, however, is that of the general standard of sermons delivered by the majority of the clergy.

We frequently hear the remark from the lips of the laity that, as compared with politicians or barristers, the oratorical powers of the priesthood are far below what they ought to be. There is an element of unfairness in this criticism. The critic may be obliged to "sit under" a Rector who has not the gift of preaching. He visits the Houses of Parliament and the Law Courts, and hears the few picked debaters in the Lords or Commons, and the leading counsel in some *cause celebre*, and compares the various representatives to the disparagement of the clerical profession. To arrive at a fair estimate, he should visit St. Paul's Cathedral or Westminster Abbey, when some leading ecclesiastic is occupying the pulpit.

(To be Continued.)

THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER.

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The Book of Common Prayer is the priceless possession of all Englishmen, and especially of all English Churchmen. Next to the English Bible, that other trophy of the Reformation, it has influenced for three centuries the English language, the standard of Faith, the devotion of our race. Wherever the English language is spoken—and even beyond that limit—our Prayer-Book is known and held in just esteem.

The Prayer-Book was not, however, a new book at the Reformation: it was a republication or modification of the different Uses or Services, such as those of Sarum, York, Bangor, Hereford and others, which had slowly grown up during the centuries, and which were themselves the development of still earlier liturgies. In fact, as Dean Burgon says, the Prayer-Book "exhibits the accumulated wisdom, not of a single age or country, but of all the ages. The East has contributed her purest traditions; the West has enshrined them in a casket of her wisest contriving; and piety has gathered up the gems of the holiest utterance wherever syllabled, careful only to conceal the blessed speaker's name. In all its essential outlines, it has been the consolation of God's people—of our fathers, and of our fathers' fathers—for more than a thousand years."

Never, I suppose, was it of more importance to have a clear understanding of both the letter and spirit of our Prayer-Book, and of the history of its compilation. He who is well informed on these points will be secured, by God's grace, from Popish error on one side, and Puritan innovation on the other.

The first thing, then, I want to emphasise is this, that in our Liturgy we have a Guarantee of Orthodoxy. This is no small advantage, as history teaches us. Those who have studied the development of the Churches tell us that even Calvin's Scriptural doctrine in course of

time, not only in Geneva, but in many of the Presbyterian congregations in England, Ireland, and the United States, gradually and silently gave way to a bare Socinianism. So long as our Prayer-Book remains, it cannot be so with ourselves. We cannot *utterly* fall away. In our churches, the pulpit here and there may be worse than useless; "dead preachers may speak to dead sinners the living truths of the living God." * * * * *

But always, the error of the pulpit's teaching will to some extent be corrected by that of the desk; for our Prayer-Book, as its preface indicates, has this as its chief feature—its adherence to the Word of God. Take away the Bible out of the Prayer-Book, and how little you have left!

I believe that no other Liturgy in the world is quite equal to our own in this. Not merely is Scripture publicly read, and congregationally sung, in every part of our public worship; but the responses, collects, ascriptions and special offices are simply steeped in Bible thought and Bible language. No man, it is not too much to say, can enter our churches and use *intelligently* our incomparable Liturgy without learning his need as a sinner, the way of salvation, and the outline of Christian life. Yes, the very warp and woof of our Prayer-Book is the Word of God, and this is chiefly what gives it its inestimable value.

Again, let me remind you of the advantage of our Liturgical forms in securing hearty Congregational Worship. No one can doubt the lawfulness of such forms, since our Lord taught us how to pray; but do we Churchmen sufficiently appreciate the gain? Does any Church give to the congregation so large a share in its services as our own? We have emphatically a book of Common—that is of joint—Prayer. In the first century, a heathen thus describes a Christian Liturgy—"The worshippers repeat a formula to Christ as God, in alternate responses." Could any description be more happy of parts of our own? Greatly as I value extempore prayers in our weekly prayer-meeting, how much should we not lose if we were thus limited in our public worship! We all know what we are going to pray for. We agree on earth as touching certain matters. We pray *with* the minister not immediately after him. We have not to guess what he is going to say, nor are we anxious as to whether his doctrine or political views will make it difficult for us to say heartily, *Amen*.

Once I was told that a good Christian man declared he could not attend our worship, because there were four or five things he could not agree to in the Liturgy. I sent him a message that if that were so, he ought to join us forthwith, for in Church he knew exactly beforehand all that he could take exception to; in chapel, he could never be sure, and only hope for the best! It was a new light, and he came henceforth. How dear these familiar words are, and familiarity is a help, not a hindrance, to devotion. We have not even to think of them, but simply of the wants which they so admirably unfold, and of Him to whom we come. "If a sensible person," says Charles Simeon, "were to write down *all* the prayers that were uttered under the names of extempore prayer, in different chapels, for one Sunday, he would fall down on his knees, and thank God for the Liturgy of the Church of England."

It is this ancient Liturgy which links together devout Churchmen all the world over, and, year by year, carries them through the whole cycle of Christian doctrine. I like, too, to think of it as one special bond of union between ourselves and those who go forth from us to the mission field. Week by week we all use the same words at the same Throne of Grace wherever we are. Surely, if it is a sacred delight to realise in our Communion Service that we unite in praise with angels and archangels, and with all the com-