

THE AFRICAN CHURCH CONGREGATION.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE CHRISTIAN SENTINEL.

REV. SIR,

The excellence of the *spirit* that pervades the Liturgy is very generally acknowledged; while little attention is paid to the evident design of its *structure*, framed, as it has clearly been, "to the use of edifying." In fact, considering, as I do, the structure of the Liturgy as adapted to be a powerful auxiliary to its spirit, I have sometimes been surprized to remark, that, those who have written ably, and at length, upon one attribute of the Church's prayers, have been wholly silent with respect to the other. It would seem that they were so wrapped up in the contemplation, that "the king's daughter is all glorious within," as to be insensible, or to forget to observe, that "her clothing is of wrought gold."

The Liturgy is a composition replenished with scriptural truth, and so replenished, I conceive, that the members of the Church may pray and praise with holiness of spirit, while its peculiar structure is designed to quicken and animate them, that they may offer up their combined devotions with "fecundity of spirit."† Thus it has been broken and divided into brief and varied exercises of devotion, in order that we may not fall into a listless languid frame; and it is further occasionally diversified by the alternate utterance of minister and people in order that we may enliven each other, that we may "consider one another to provoke"‡ unto the "good work" of prayer, thanksgiving and praise. But how is the pious design of the Church marred by the apathy and silence of her children!

In the Book of Exodus we are told that certain arrangements were made in the service of the Jewish tabernacle, "for glory and for beauty."§ And shall there be no external "glory and beauty" in the service of the Christian tabernacle? Is the glory departed from our Israel?¶ Is there no "glory and beauty" in the worship of the Protestant Episcopal Church? Wherein does it consist? Stands it in decorated temples—in white and shining garments,—or in music's sweet and solemn sound? No; but let me not be misunderstood. I do not affect to undervalue or despise any observances, which, untainted by superstition, and sanctioned by ancient usage, tend in any degree to promote the decency and propriety, the dignity and solemnity of Divine worship. But the glory of our Church's ritual, her own peculiar unequalled "glory and beauty," is then, and then only, seen, understood and felt, when the whole congregation, or as many of them as possible, unite in her service with the lips, the understanding and the heart;—not only with the understanding, but with the heart, not only with the heart but with the lips.

And is this observance to be lightly esteemed? Is it nothing, that it comes recommended to us by the practice of the ancient Jewish Church, by the example of the early Christian Church,—by the authority of our own Church,—and by the Apocalyptic vision of the heavenly Church? I am persuaded, that its revival would greatly promote the increase, as well as the edification of the members of our communion. I am persuaded that in such a case the Church's mode of worship would approve itself to the judgment and to the feelings of many who are ignorant of her, or who have separated themselves from her bosom;—would approve itself to their judgment, as a reasonable, to their feelings as a beautiful service. They would come in and say, "It is good for us to be here! Here will we pitch our tent, and take up our abode. Here will we dwell, for we have a delight therein!"

O then, let not that observance be despised which enlists the social principle, powerful in evil, but not powerless in good, on the side of religion;—enkindling and keeping alive the devotion of the assembly;—which promotes an enlightened attachment to the Church and to her services;—which at once cuts off and annihilates certain objections that are made to our mode of worship, by taking away the foundation on which they are made to rest; by which the Church is increased,—man is edified, and God is glorified.

* Ps. xlv. 15. † Rom. xii. 11. ‡ Heb. x. 24.
§ Exod. xxviii. 2, 40. ¶ 1 Sam. iv. 21.

It is hardly possible for language to describe the contrast, striking as it is, between the common, but most objectionable, and the rare, but most approved method of conducting the worship of the Church, when the clerk is every thing and the people nothing, or when the people are every thing and the clerk nothing, or but as one of the people. A late pious clergyman* has well said, "I never enter a Gothic Church without feeling myself impressed with this idea. These are the venerable walls that have for ages from the lips of succeeding generations re-echoed this sound:—

"Thou art the King of glory, O Christ!"

But how much more pleasing and impressive is the thought that that sound ascends on high, clothed with the full swell of hundreds of united voices, than that it goes forth, as it were, bare and naked, the meagre, perhaps uncouth, utterance of one solitary being.

Do any feel ashamed, do any think it too much condescension thus to join with their fellow-worshippers? Is any rank too exalted? What is human rank,—however worthy of respect, and however useful to the well ordering of society,—what is human rank in the presence of the Majesty of Heaven? Surely in this particular exercise of devotion, as well as in the general influence of religion on the heart, while "the brother of low degree rejoices in that he is exalted,"† let the rich, in "that he is made low."‡ But do any think themselves too high thus to condescend? The Church does not think so. Her voice is in unison with that of the Psalmist, "Kings of the earth and all people, princes, and all judges of the world, . . . praise the name of the Lord." Or in the uplifting of the voice to God, is there any thing that ought to be repugnant to the delicacy of Christian Females? The Psalmist did not judge so. The Church does not judge so: "Young men and maidens, old men and children, praise the name of the Lord."§ What! and are children not forbidden; nay, are they invited to swell the chorus of praise and thanksgiving? Let then the children—all of them—begin, and the rest will follow—let them "cry in the temple,"§ and the rest shall follow. Ye then, that are matrons of the Church of England, ye that are mothers in this our Israel! whose delightful task it is, or ought to be, to rear the tender mind, to train up your children "to lead a godly and a Christian life"—do not think it a work of supererogation to bring them up also in the practice of this primitive observance. This if ye shall do, then once more shall the Church arise and "put on her glorious apparel"—her own glorious apparel—of united voices in the sanctuary of God, and "aid herself with strength," that strength with which the most High endures devout and united hearts met together in his name.

To illustrate and confirm all that I have said, I shall now mention a scene that I once witnessed in the course of my journeyings through the Cis-atlantic regions. I came to a certain city, and on the first Sunday after my arrival, I went to worship among a Protestant Episcopal congregation of whom I had before heard an interesting report. I looked around and saw that the whole assemblage, minister and people, were of the race of Africa. I saw it written in the countenances of all, that themselves or their fathers had been the victims of the slave-trade, that most cruel, most cowardly, and most detestable of piracies. As I went in, a sable gentleman instantly directed me to a pew, and no sooner was I seated than a dusky lady in the pew behind, perceiving that I was a stranger, and that I had not an American Prayer-book, made an offer of one to me. More than once in the course of my life, I have experienced or witnessed less courtesy in bad respects among people of paler complexion, age, and in my own country; and I merely mention these little incidents to show to what a degree of civilization and of Christian refinement these children of Africa had attained. Then, for the first time in my life, I had the satisfaction of extending the right hand of fellowship to an African brother in the ministry;—then, for the first time I beheld such an one arrayed in the white vestments of the Episcopal Church, and preaching the word of God in purity and

* Mr. Cecil. † James i. 9, 10. ‡ Psalm cxlviii. 11, 15.
§ Mat. xxi. 15. ¶ Ps. xciii. Prayer-book.