

From "LITURGICA," by the Rev. John Ayre.

EXPEDIENCY OF FORMS OF WORSHIP.

"Let all things," says the Apostle, "be done decently, and in order." To render divine worship orderly, it is needful that, in every congregation, some one person be the spokesman of the whole, in whose addresses to the Deity all the assembly may join, with one heart and one mind. For if each man were at liberty to form his own petitions, it would generate irrepressible confusions; it would break that, which should have been one united act of public worship, into numberless insulated acts of private prayer; it would frustrate the purpose of the assembling of ourselves together, and render vain the promise of the Lord, "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven." It is clear then that the freedom of public prayer is to be so far restrained, that the congregation must be content to pray in the words, and at the dictation, of another. The question, which now arises, is, whether the minister shall offer a precomposed address, or pour forth his own unwritten, unpremeditated thoughts? which is best adapted to give glory to God, and to cherish a devotional spirit in man?

The principal, in fact almost the sole, argument against a form of prayer is, that it must needs be general; that it cannot bend to the peculiar and special wants of times and seasons, and must therefore often be either defective, or unsuited to the occasion. But this objection is invalidated in few words. Public prayer must be general; its very end is to confess common sins, to supplicate common mercies, to offer up the praises of a whole congregation, for the gifts bestowed upon the Church at large. He that will descend to very minute particulars, must "enter into his closet, and shut his door, and" there "pray to his Father who seeth in secret." It is in the silence of retirement, that personal sins must be acknowledged, and private blessings gratefully remembered. If you would unite a multitude, it must be upon the broad foundation of that wherein they all agree; you must not put into their mouths a confession of sins to which they cannot all plead guilty, or a petition for mercies they do not all require, or a thanksgiving for gifts they may not have all received. And as to the unbending rigour of a pre-script form, which suits not itself to times and seasons, are not our wants always, in general, the same? Is there a time when we have it not to say, we are "miserable sinners," with "no health in us?" when we have not to supplicate "spare thy people, good Lord, whom thou hast redeemed with thy most precious blood?" when we have not to offer our "most hearty thanks" "for creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life," and for "inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ?" when we ought not to make "intercessions for kings, and for all that are in authority," and "for all men?" The grand materials, if I may so speak, of worship, do not vary, as long as we are in the same world, subject to the same passions and infirmities, opposed by the same enemies, with the same merciful Father ready in Christ Jesus to supply our need: the great materials of worship cannot vary, till faith shall end in vision, and hope be lost in enjoyment, and the church, militant no longer, shall be radiant with the splendid glories of the new Jerusalem. And as to particular emergencies, it is easy to provide those prayers and thanksgiving, which are suited to the time, and to leave them to be used or not, as occasion may require. The specialties of famine, drought, pestilence, war, may be foreseen, and prepared for: and if new and unthought-of conjunctures occur, why should not, (as our practice ever has been) particular and seasonable forms be at the time composed, imploring the boon which is then most needful, or ascribing to the Lord the honour of that blessing for which we are then most joyful?

Having disposed of these objections, we may properly advance to the more immediate inquiry, Why the church of England hath deemed it fitting to enjoin a precomposed form of prayer? Because she conceives that the united wisdom and piety of many, matured by attentive deliberation, are more likely to order a service acceptable to God, and useful to the congregation, than the spontaneous aspirations of any indi-

vidual, however great his talents, however deep his devotion. For though God has promised to be with his people, more especially his ministering servants, and to be to them "a mouth, and wisdom, and a door of utterance," yet such divine assistance was never intended to supersede the necessity of diligent exertion. God works by means, and not without them; he has given us faculties and natural endowments to employ for him, the careful use of which he may be expected to bless: and therefore all the pains and preparation we can bring, are, on our part, needful, if we would entertain a reasonable expectation that our "labour shall not be in vain in the Lord." The injunction to the Apostles not to premeditate, and the promise that in the hour of their necessity it should be given them what they should speak, were plainly, in their literal import, applicable only to the peculiar times and circumstances in which they stood when they were brought before governors and kings, for their Master's sake, and cannot without manifest violence to our Saviour's meaning, be made to refer to ordinary cases. And therefore, should we choose to throw away all helps, and reject all preparation, we should almost universally find, and the rare exceptions would only confirm the rule, that such, from the infirmity of our nature, is the dispersion of our thoughts, the imperfection of devoutest feelings, that much that is important would be omitted, and much that is irrelevant, be introduced.

Nor are we to forget the peculiar intent of prayer. God has ordained it as the channel, through which he bestows his favours: not as though he were hard to be prevailed on, or required our supplications to change his purpose; but that our hearts, by the confession of our guilt, may be bowed down in deeper humility; by the enumeration of our wants, may more simply rest upon his mercy; by the recital of his kindness may be warmed into a holier fervour of thanksgiving. In private, we are at liberty to use our discretion, and to employ the means best suited to our own individual temperament; in public, we must consider our brethren, and pursue that mode which most reasonably may be thought to contribute to the edification of the whole. Now I ask, which are most likely to unite in pious and serious devotion, a mingled multitude, among whom are many cold and worldly hearts, and many captious criticising spirits,—the raw effusions of the instant, without order or plan, or those majestic, well-proved prayers, in which holy men of old, confessors and martyrs, have held near communion with God, and found him present to relieve their necessity? We must remember also, with whom we have to do. The volubility of a beggar may often, by dint of mere importunity, compel our hand to give that which our judgment would withhold—but God is not so to be wrought on; the devotion with which we approach him, though intense, should be calm; the petitions we present, though earnest, must be sober; lest putting forth, like Uzzah, an unhallowed hand upon the ark, we receive, not a blessing, but a judgment.

If it be urged that every individual minister might premeditate and carefully prepare the prayers for his flock, as he does his pulpit addresses, we reply, that these are essentially different. In the pulpit, we have a wider field to traverse, and the knowledge and habits of different congregations require different modes of instruction,—we have "milk for babes," and "strong meat" for those that are of riper years;—we are then to come down to minute and individual detail, that as "faithful and wise stewards," we may divide to every man "his portion of meat in due season."—whereas in public prayer, as we have seen, we must keep more to generalities, and thus have less variety of subject on which to expatiate. And if each shepherd might lead his flock by a separate road, where would be that beautiful and blessed union in which we now assemble? It is a delightful thought, that while we are on our knees, ten thousand other gathered multitudes are kneeling too, and from them all, one touching cry ascends to heaven, "Have mercy upon us miserable sinners." And even if diversity were no objection, surely he must be bold who could hope, however eminent his talents, or high his piety, or close his study, to match himself single-handed with men, some of the holiest and the wisest that the world hath seen. We might easily divine to whom the palm would be assigned—but of this more hereafter.

BISHOP OF LICHFIELD AND COVENTRY.

It has seldom fallen to our lot to record a death more deeply or more generally lamented than that of the excellent prelate who forms the subject of this memoir. The name of Bishop Ryder has long been associated in the minds of good men of every denomination, both at home and abroad, with the cause of vital piety, and the best interests of the Church of England; and we doubt not that the regret occasioned by his removal has been coextensive with the knowledge of his personal qualities and of his public efforts in the service of religion.

In that part of the kingdom which formed the more immediate scene of his labors for the last twelve years of his valuable life, the sensation produced by his death has been of no ordinary kind: it may be truly said that this event, unlooked for beyond the circle of his private friends, has clothed a diocese in mourning; and the grief has been as real as the demonstrations of it have been universal. Had public testimonies been wanting to vindicate the estimation in which he was held, the sorrow and the tears of multitudes whom his kindness had won, or his charities had relieved, or his instructions had blessed and comforted, would have gone up, in secret, as a memorial before God—honorable alike to the Giver and the gift—of the grace bestowed upon His faithful servant. But in this instance, at least, the public voice has not represented only, but expressed, the private feeling; and the solemnities which struck the ear or met the eye, were not the formal announcement merely of the decease of a high ecclesiastical functionary, but the utterance of a sentiment which filled all hearts, "that the Church had lost one of the best of bishops, and the clergy and their congregations truly a 'father in God.'" Hence, not in the cathedral city alone of the diocese, as is customary on such occasions, but in many of the principal towns, and even in some of the country villages the tolling of bells on the day of interment, till a late hour of the night, solemnized his obsequies; and on the Sunday following the churches and chapels were hung in black; funeral sermons were preached very generally throughout the diocese; and not only the clergy and their families, but many also of the laity, put on mourning. To perpetuate, by some public record, the name of so revered a bishop, subscriptions were immediately set on foot for erecting a handsome monument to his memory in Lichfield Cathedral; and together with this—as a memorial still more appropriate, as many thought, of his Lordship's pastoral character and useful labors—in building a church in a populous suburb of Birmingham, to be called after his name.

He died at Hastings, on Thursday, the 31st of March, after an illness which, though there is reason to think it had silently been undermining his constitution for the last two or three years of his life, had not assumed a decidedly serious character till within a few months of his decease. A total prostration of strength, accompanied with an organic affection of the heart, appeared to be the proximate causes of his death.—*London Christian Observer.*

CHRISTIAN FIDELITY.

The great business of the Christian in this world is to live for eternity—the main objects of this life have reference to the kingdom of God. If our first concern be to amass wealth, or to take care of it, to secure all the comforts which we desire for ourselves and our families, or to gratify some other passion whose influence may control us, and we give to religion and the soul only fragments of time and fractions of money, which can be spared without imposing any degree of constraint upon ourselves, are we living for ourselves or for God? Are we not exhausting life in the pursuit of that which is unworthy such devotion? Do we not sacrifice our greater interests for the less? How little satisfaction will be felt by us when at the close of life we shall be compelled to review our course, and discover that, although bound by solemn engagements to "spend and be spent for Christ," we have devoted our affections, our powers, and all our efforts to secular concerns. We may have amassed those perishing riches which God may make a curse instead of a blessing to our offspring; and feel that for this sordid portion we have been traitors to our Benefactor, and sold our souls to death. How lovely is the following picture of the feelings and life of the devoted believer:—