

THE COLLECTS.

Being a paper read by the Rev. L. N. Tucker, B.A., Assistant-Minister of St. George's Church, Montreal, at the meeting of the Diocesan Sunday-school Association, 21st March, 1887.

INTRODUCTION.

MY LORD,—I feel that an apology is the only fitting introduction to my paper to-night. To write, with any degree of point and of fulness, in the space of twenty minutes, on a subject so varied and so apparently lacking in unity as the Collects of the Book of Common Prayer, demands great assurance on the part of the writer or great indulgence on the part of the hearers. From the nature of the case my remarks can only be general and fragmentary. And prepared, as they have been at this, the busiest season of the year, they are perhaps not what a little more time and thought might have enabled me to make them. And I would say at the outset that I confine my subject to those Collects which, strictly speaking, form part of the Communion service, which have corresponding Epistles and Gospels and which are described as "to be used throughout the year;" in other words, the Collects generally taught in Sunday-school.

I.

And first let us look at the subject from the child's point of view. In the Sunday-school, and indeed in the day-school, most of the work of children must be the simple, though not always easy, process of committing to memory. Many of the deepest impressions and much of the most useful knowledge are thus obtained. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance that the subject-matter should be, both in substance and in form, the purest of refined gold. Now, I do not know, apart from the Holy Scriptures themselves and perhaps the Catechism of the Church, anything that at all compares with the Collects in this respect. They are short and therefore not too great a tax upon the memory. Each is complete in itself, and therefore requires no reference to the context, which is often confusing. The easy rhythmical flow of their language makes them easily learned. There is one for every Sunday in the year, and thus they always come with the freshness, force and interest of special application. In the aggregate they cover the whole range of theology and that in its practical bearing on the wants of men and thus they declare, in the most effectual form, the whole counsel of God and war against narrowness of view and deficiency of principle which are never so mischievous as in childhood. In detail their sound and solid teachings dissolved, as it were, in a stream of lucid, limpid language make the pupil forget their depth while they grow upon him as he advances in years and are assimilated with as little difficulty and as much gratification and benefit as a glass of spring water on a hot summer's day. They compress into a few lines of exquisite sweetness the deep things of God conceived in the ideas and expressed in the words of childhood. And in the terse, idiomatic, simple, musical flow of their sentences the youth of the Church of England becomes acquainted with the best specimens of pure literature, noble sentiment, lofty aspiration, sound knowledge and humble and reverent worship, and becomes immovably attached to the Liturgy and worship of their own Church and less easily attracted by the charm of the long-winded, uncouth and sometimes irreverent extemporaneous prayer that so widely prevails in other communions.

II.

Let us next look at the subject from the teacher's point of view.

1.—AIM OF SUNDAY-SCHOOL TEACHING.

Our first aim in teaching the young should, of course, be to impart to them spiritual religion by bringing them to a saving knowledge of Christ. A second aim, and by no means an unimportant one, should be to train them up in an intelligent comprehension of and a steadfast loyalty to the Church of England. Simple loyalty to our own Church and simple faithfulness to our trust as her representatives should keep that aim constantly before our eyes. We have so few opportunities of doing this that we should neglect none. Too many in our ranks already are earnest Christians and indifferent Churchmen, for no other reason than that, while they have been taught to know their Saviour, they have not been taught to know their Church. I lean decidedly to the opinion from some little experience in both town and country, in both Canada and England, that, in the Church to which we belong, we can best do the work committed unto us, we can best promote spiritual religion and build up men on their most holy faith by a right teaching and use of the system of the Church to which we belong. Now, to enable us to do this no other scheme than I know of at all approaches in value to the Collects of the Prayer Book. Their substance is not only adapted to, but intended for the purpose. And their place in the ecclesiastical year gives them, every Sunday, all the point and interest of a special lesson. They shine, each with its individual lustre and, combined, they form a crown of jewels that, touched with heavenly glory, reflect every hue of revealed truth, blending so harmoniously in the rainbow of divine mercy that spans this vale of tears and, endued with power from on high, they appeal to every chord in human hearts made glad by the great joy of Christmas, made pure by the crimson stream of Calvary, made strong by the vigil and discipline of the wilderness and made holy by the gift of Pentecost—a fitting crown this for the Bride, the Lamb's wife, in her season of lonely waiting and weary struggle.

II.—ORIGIN OF THE COLLECTS.

The Collects may be said, in general terms, to be either ancient or modern. The ancient Collects are derived chiefly from the Sacramentaries of Leo the Great, Bishop of Rome, in 440 A.D. and Gelasius, Bishop of Rome, in 492 A.D. A sacramentary is the oldest form of the order for the administration of the Holy Communion, what in a more corrupt age of the Church became known as the Missal or Mass Book. It is interesting to note that these two Episcopates and the interval between them saw the dissolution of the Roman Empire and the breaking up of the whole social system of the old world, and is one of the saddest periods in the history of man and of the Church. The substance of the Collects sprang, in a great measure, from the wants and the yearning of those awful days. It is not unlikely, too, that Leo and Gelasius adopted and adapted material that had been in use in the Church for generations and for centuries. The ancient Collects thus take us back to the very verge of Apostolic times.

The modern ones were mostly composed at the Reformation to emphasize its special teachings or to replace those that were unsound in doctrine or were addressed to saints and angels. The ancient Collects are by far the more numerous.

III.—NATURE OF COLLECTS.

The Collects are prayers. This fact can always be used for two important purposes:—

(a) It can be used to check levity or to deepen serious thought. In studying and reciting their lessons the children can be taught not only that their minds are engaged in a serious exercise, but that they should be in the

attitude of prayer, their hearts and their aspirations accompanying their words.

(b) It can also be used to teach what prayer is and that is one of the most important and one of the easiest lessons that can be taught to a youthful mind. The very nature of a Collect, as a prayer, without reference to its contents, suggests human weakness and sin, divine power, holiness and mercy, the all-seeing eye, the ever-open ear, the efficacy of the atonement and the intercession of Christ, the way of access to God and the value of the throne of grace. All such lessons are vital, are inherent in every Collect and do not spring, in the same degree, from any other scheme of lessons that can be drawn up.

IV.—SUBSTANCE OF THE COLLECTS.

Passing from the nature of a Collect to its substance we pass from general considerations to particular subjects but all of the highest value. I cannot treat the Collects in detail, I can only take them in the aggregate. From that point of view we find them to be a complete body of theology as, e.g., the first and second coming of Christ, the study of the Holy Scriptures and the preaching of the Word, the manifold lessons of our Saviour's earthly life, His cross, His resurrection, His priestly office, the outpouring of the Holy Ghost with His manifold gifts of purity and power, the necessity for vigilance and self denial and the example of the saints, which illustrates the text "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." And in this form it is not the dry bones of theology such as we find them in the text books and compendiums, but the living form with motion and energy. It is the grace of God meeting the wants of men. It is dogma applied to life. It is the Creed and the Ten Commandments, not as they are enshrined in books, not as they fall from the lips, but as they fashion the life. It is the most practical way of teaching the truth of God. It is the most effectual means of reaching the heart and moulding the character. For we study, as it were, on our knees the great problems of human sin and human destiny, of divine compassion and divine help—we study these, as it were, on our knees with the deepest secrets of our hearts laid bare in the presence of the living God.

V.—FORM OF THE COLLECTS.

We pass next from the substance of the Collect to its form, from the kernel to the shell that contains it, from the idea or sentiment to the framework that enshrines it. We are here in the presence of veritable gems or works of art. Every Collect, even the shortest, is, in its structure, composed of four parts:—

- (a) The invocation, or title given to God.
- (b) The recital of doctrine, generally recalling some striking passage of Scripture.
- (c) The petition, referring to some important need.
- (d) The mediation, coupled sometimes with an ascription of praise.

In many of the Collects the doctrine is not recited; it is simply implied or brought in indirectly. The petition is always one in substance though often various in form. Take a few examples:

19th Sunday after Trinity.

"O God," the invocation; "forasmuch as without Thee we are not able to please Thee," the doctrine; "Mercifully grant that Thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts," the petition; "Through Jesus Christ our Lord," the mediation.

7th Sunday after Trinity.

"Lord of all power and might," the invocation; "who art the Author and Giver of all good things," the doctrine; "Graft in our hearts the love of Thy Name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness and of Thy great mercy keep us in the same," the invocation;