

FIRST SUNDAYS AT CHURCH.

Alice and William expressed themselves greatly obliged to their papa for the care with which he had explained this matter; and the conversation afterwards proceeded as follows:—

'The interlutory sentences, or Versicles, which are used after the Lord's Prayer in this place,' said Mr. Hargrave, 'are taken chiefly from the Psalms, and they form, whether by design or otherwise, an epitome of the Collects that regularly follow.'

'Have you any question to ask, William, respecting these Versicles?'

'I do not remember any, papa, at present.'

'Look at those two,' continued Mr. Hargrave—'Give peace in our time, O Lord; because there is none other that fighteth for us, but only thou, O God.' Did you find any difficulty in understanding this petition; or in discovering the connexion between the two parts of it?'

'None at all, papa,' replied William. 'We beseech God to grant peace in our days; and then we say, as a reason why we have recourse to God for that blessing,—that He only can fight for us successfully, and therefore that it is to Him only that we look either to conquer our enemies or to keep them off.'

'Very true, my dear,' said Mr. Hargrave: 'there is no real difficulty in the matter. And I dare say you will be surprised and shocked when I tell you that some people who have fancied themselves wise, and who have attempted to find fault with our Liturgy, have been ignorant or wicked enough to make this petition the subject of their censure, and even of their ridicule.'

'How surely would the simplicity and candour of a child-like heart prevent men from vainly attempting to discover blemishes in the sacred service of our Church!' observed Mrs. Hargrave.

'True, my dear,' said Mr. Hargrave in reply; 'when the proud heart is so converted as to become like that of a little child, then farewell all opposition to the saving truths of God's word, and all idle cavils against our catholic forms of prayer! You understand the purport of the petition before you very well, William,' continued Mr. Hargrave; 'but in order that you may have, if possible, a more lively apprehension of it, let me offer an easy illustration of the matter. Suppose we were threatened with a war, and that we knew of one able general, but one only, who would be certainly successful if our forces were placed under his command. Now, if we were desirous that the war should not last long, to whom should we apply with a request that he would take measures to bring about a speedy peace?'

'To that general, of course, papa.'

'If then we were to say to him, We are desirous of the blessings of peace, and we earnestly entreat you to undertake the conduct of the approaching war, because we are persuaded there is no officer besides yourself who can face our enemies with a prospect of success—would there be anything very inconsistent in the plea?'

'Certainly not, papa; and that is exactly as we pray in these Versicles.'

'The meaning is,' says a judicious commentator, 'that whatever help we have besides, we look upon it as nothing, without that of the Almighty: whom therefore we beg, when we are in peace, to continue it, by restraining such as would disturb it; and when we are not, to restore it, by turning the hearts, or overthrowing the attempts, of those who have infringed it.'

'Papa,' said William, 'please to tell me why the prayers which follow are called Collects?'

'They were anciently so called,' replied Mr. Hargrave, 'either because they were recited in the public assemblies, which were entitled collecta; or because they contain a brief collection of petitions for all things necessary for soul and body; or rather, as our divines for the most part incline to think, because they are collected out of the Epistles and Gospels for the days to which they are severally assigned.'

'Most of these Collects,' says one of our commentators, 'are above twelve hundred years old, having been used in the Western Church from the time of Gregory the Great, and many of them before. However, partly at, and partly since, the Reformation, such of the Collects in the books then in use as needed and deserved it, have been carefully corrected: many that were thought improper, quite removed; and new ones framed in their stead: so that they now compose altogether an unexceptionable and most admirable collection of true Scriptural devotion.'

'With respect to the form of these Collects, it has been observed that they are, for the most part, directed to the Father, through the Son; and usually they begin with the motive inducing us to ask, which is an humble acknowledgment of our own weakness, and of the adorable goodness and perfections of God; and then mention some great or comprehensive blessing desired; concluding with the ground of our hope, that we shall obtain it through Jesus Christ, our Lord; or for his sake; or through his merits and mediation; according to his own most gracious promise, "Whoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you." (John xvii. 23.)'

'I think,' observed Mrs. Hargrave, 'that we have had two excellent specimens of the "Collects for the day" in this Morning's Service. They are admirable prayers in themselves, and their connexion with the Epistles is remarkably striking. Indeed the Collect for Advent Sunday is closely connected with both the Epistle and the Gospel for the day.'

'The Collects "for Peace," and "for Grace to live well,"' observed Mr. Hargrave, 'seem to require but little comment. The former, you may perceive, is a petition for temporal, the latter for spiritual, goods: and both of them are simple, pious, and comprehensive. The former is taken from the Roman service; the latter principally from the Greek, as others of our prayers besides are: "the compilers of our Liturgy" (as it has been said) "prudently extracting from both whatever was proper to enrich and add authority to the work in which they were engaged."'

'I think, papa,' said William, turning to the Litany, 'you told me that the word Litany means "A supplication."'

'Yes,' replied Mr. Hargrave. 'It means an earnest or vehement supplication; and in the service of the Church it is applied to those forms of prayer in which the voices of minister and people unite in beseeching mercy and protection, or else take up the several petitions alternately. Such Litany has been used in the Church during the last fourteen hundred years: and our own, which is, in substance, very ancient, may justly be regarded as one of the most complete, and most solemn, pieces of devotion that have ever been composed by man. Do you remember the distinction between the four parts of which I told you it consists?'

'Yes, papa,' replied William. 'You told me that it consists of the invocation, deprecations, intercessions, and conclusion.'

'What is the invocation?'

'It extends from the beginning of the Litany to those words, "O holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity, three Persons and one God, have mercy upon us, miserable sinners."'

'Right,' said Mr. Hargrave. 'This invocation, you may observe, is addressed to every person in the blessed Trinity separately, and then to all the three Persons conjointly. By the separate invocation we acknowledge "every Person by himself to be God and Lord," and by the joint invocation we acknowledge, at the same time, "that there are not three Gods or three Lords." And whilst we are thus briefly making a profession of faith, we make also an humble confession of sin, and a general entreaty for mercy, in those truly appropriate and pathetic words, "Have mercy upon us, miserable sinners." This mode of address, let it be remembered, is in accordance with the ancient practice of the Catholic Church: and if we have in our hearts a sense of our unworthiness, combined with the faith of the Gospel, we shall feel that such address is in every respect in perfect agreement with truth and propriety.—What are the limits of the second portion of the Litany, which consists of deprecations, or prayers for deliverance from evil of various kinds?'

'This part begins with "Remember not, Lord, our offences," and ends with "in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment, good Lord, deliver us."'

'It does so. You ought to take notice that all the petitions in the Litany, from the beginning of the deprecations to the end of the intercessions, are addressed to the Son of God as Redeemer and Mediator, and are offered up by persons who profess themselves to have been "redeemed by his most precious blood." This portion is a prayer for deliverance from all evils to which we are or may be exposed, in body or soul; it begins with a prayer for pardon of sin, and deliverance from evil and mischief in general, and then goes on to enumerate various evils from which we especially desire to be protected. This enumeration of evils which beset us is very comprehensive; and all who know their own hearts, and their spiritual and temporal dangers, will agree that it is most wisely and prudently drawn up. The people join the minister mentally in the whole of this form of supplication, as well as in all others; but they unite audibly also at short intervals, in those expressive words, "Good Lord, deliver us," and afterwards in that petition, "We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord." This surely cannot be suspected of being a vain repetition! It gives an effect and air of fervency to the whole course of supplication, than which nothing more appropriate, nothing more solemn, can possibly be devised. May we have grace, whenever we use these words, to pray also with the heart and understanding for deliverance from evil, and for the acceptance of our petitions.—Describe to me now the third portion of the Litany.'

'The third part consists of intercessions. It begins with these words, "We sinners do beseech thee to hear us, O Lord God," and ends with the prayer for the forgiveness of enemies, and the conversion of their hearts.'

'We may add, perhaps, to this part the following petition for the gift and preservation of the fruits of the earth. Having prayed first for ourselves, and then for others, we offer up this petition for ourselves and others together. Indeed, we sometimes pray for ourselves as well as our brethren, in other parts of this intercessory portion. And I am much pleased with this, for it reminds me of the intimate union which subsists between all members of Christ's mystical body, the Church. Repeat to me, William,' continued Mr. Hargrave, 'the text which I pointed out to you the other day as being peculiarly applicable to the Litany, and to this portion in particular.'

'"I exhort, therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty." (1 Timothy ii. 1, 2.)'

'I admire very much,' said Mr. Hargrave, 'that opening of the intercessory portion of our Litany, "We sinners do beseech thee to hear us, O Lord God." While we venture to ask God's blessings for others, we forget not, in so doing, that we are sinners ourselves. In connexion with these prayers, I often think of those words of the patriarch, who ventured to plead on behalf of the wicked cities of the plain, "Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes." The spirit and temper of Abraham, as it appeared on the occasion to which I refer (Gen. xviii. 23—33), is beautifully transfused, if I may so speak, into this part of our general supplication.—What is the conclusion of the Litany?'

'That general petition for repentance, pardon, and renewal of heart, and those short but powerful addresses to our blessed Saviour as "the Son of God," "the Lamb of God," and "Christ," or the Messiah, which immediately follow the intercessions, and precede the Lord's Prayer and the separate petitions and Versicles.'

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'It has been impossible,' continued Mr. Hargrave, 'and equally unnecessary, to discuss the several petitions contained in this comprehensive form of prayer. But before we pass on, I wish to read to you a passage from an excellent commentator, which gives a good view, and a true character and description, of the whole. "This interchangeable way of worship, performed by turns between the minister and people, is of the same advantage to the worshippers in the Litany as in the Psalms; it mutually relieves both parties, while it excites and inflames their piety. But with this grateful interchange there is kept up the most exact order. In the deprecations from evil, we proceed gradually from the evil of sin to the evil of punishment, from spiritual to temporal, from the greater to the less. In the intercessions for good, we begin with the holy Church universal: then particularize for the principal members of that part of it which is established among us; proceeding in order for the king and the royal family; for the orders and degrees of men in Church and State; first for those spiritual, then for those temporal; for all bishops, priests and deacons; for the lords of the council, and all the nobility and magistrates; and lastly, for all the people of the realm. Then we pray for all kinds of good for all men; for the piety of the faithful; for the conversion of the deceived; for the confirmation of the weak; for the relief of the afflicted; for the preservation of the distressed; for the pardon and reconciliation of enemies; for the grant of plenty, and things necessary for the body; and, lastly, for the forgiveness of sins, and things necessary for the soul; or, as in the Lord's Prayer, for our daily bread, and for forgiveness of our trespasses. Let those who accuse our public prayers as too general in their form, view this punctual and regular enumeration of all evils that are hurtful, or of all goods that are expedient for the bodies or the souls of men, either for the Church in general, or for any of its members in particular; let them seek diligently through their own performances, whether extemporary or composed; let them search all their assemblies, and see if there be any such thing in their worship; anything so full in its matter, so regular in its method, and so solemn in its expressions, as our Litany."'

'The good man is well assured, that God will never refuse the protection of his Providence, or the aid of his Spirit. And what can be too difficult for such a one? Providence can prevent a temptation, or remove it; the Spirit can support him under it, and enable him to vanquish it; may, it can enable him to extract new strength and vigour from it; my grace is sufficient for thee, (2 Cor. xii. 9), the truth of which assertion has been illustriously proved by the victories of martyrs and confessors, who have triumphed over the united force of men and devils. Though then the conscience of human frailty may awaken in the best of men fear and caution, the assurance of divine assistance cannot but beget in them an holy confidence. The snares and temptations of the world, the subtlety and vigilance of the devil, may justly create a solicitude in the best of men; but when they consider themselves encompassed with the divine favour, they can have no reason to despond.—Rev. Dr. Lucas.'

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as are educated to think, are with few exceptions totally indifferent to religion, unless it be as far as it is their policy to impress their inferiors with its importance. Nor is this at all astonishing; since it is hardly possible that a thinking man should not be staggered at the palpable absurdities of animism, even in its mildest form, and secretly despise what it may not be always safe or prudent openly to impugn. The extravagances of that system have been too frequently and too ably exposed to render it necessary more than to hint at them: saint-worship, relic-worship, priest-worship, the spells of palm-osters, genuflexions, tapers, processions, the imputed authority of childish legends and ridiculous tales; and to all those, though in themselves but a part, may be added the forced and unnatural ecclibacy of the professed religious of both sexes, with the consequent violation of their vows. That the omish church appears no longer the arrogant despot it formerly was, cannot be denied; but the change has been wrought from without, pressed upon it by circumstances it could not resist. Had the reformation been extinguished in its birth, the Vatican of the nineteenth century would not have been a whit more tolerant than when in the zenith of its power; and perhaps at this very instant another Borgia or another Medici might have been seated in the papal chair.—Rae Wilson.

THE CREED OF GREGORY THAUMATURGUS.

"There is one God, the Father of the living Word, of the subsisting wisdom and the power, and the eternal impression: the perfect generator of the perfect: the Father of an only begotten Son.

"There is one God, the alone of the alone: God of God, or the impression and image of the Godhead: the energizing Word: the Wisdom which devised the systems of the Universe: the Power which effected the whole creation: the true Son of the true Father: the invisible of the invisible: the incorruptible of the incorruptible: the immortal of the immortal; and the eternal of the eternal.

"There is one Holy Spirit, deriving from God his subsistence; who, by the Son, shone forth upon mankind: the perfect image of the perfect Son: the life which gives existence to the living: the holy fountain: the sanctity, and the dispenser, of sanctification: by whom God the Father is revealed, who is over all, and in all: by whom God the Son is manifested, who is through all.

"A perfect Trinity, in glory, eternity, and sovereignty; indivisible, and unalienable!"—Christian Observer.

Gregorius Theodorus, surnamed Thaumaturgus, bishop of Neo-Cæsarea, in the third century, is said to have bequeathed this Creed, which bears his name, (drawn up above a century before either the Nicene, or the Athanasian, Creed,) as a valuable legacy to his church; the autograph of which, we are told, was extant, a hundred years after his death, which took place, A. D. 264.—Gregory Nyssen, his biographer, has preserved this Creed in the original Greek.

The Garner.

THE CHURCH MAY BE AFFLICTED, NOT DESTROYED.

The Church of Christ hath received indeed many and great promises of particular favour and assistance. But then it is not necessary that this divine favour should exert itself in bestowing of temporal prosperity. Affliction and persecution may be sometimes far more convenient to the Church, to restore her decayed discipline, to revive her languishing zeal, to awaken the negligent, to separate the false, to reform all the members of it. The Church hath indeed experienced in all ages manifest interpositions of Divine Providence in favour of her. She hath been often freed in an extraordinary manner from the rage of her persecutors, the designs of apostates, and infection of heretics. Kings have been her nursing fathers, and Queens her nursing mothers. She hath surmounted the opposition of all her enemies, and, through an uninterrupted course of many ages, enjoyed both the blessings of the earth, and the hopes of heaven. The Apostles, reduced at the crucifixion and departure of our Lord to a miserable condition, were comforted, and re-animated by the mission of the Holy Ghost, at the feast of Pentecost. Heaven then declared for them by conferring extraordinary gifts of knowledge on them, and afterward by confirming their preaching with no less wonderful miracles; which removed their anxiety, convinced them that the love of their Master now in heaven was both continued and increased to them, and enabled them to subdue the victorious Roman Empire to the law and the name of Christ. And lest we should imagine the arm of God to be shortened to us, we of this Church and Nation have been more than once, even in this age [1688], delivered in an extraordinary manner from danger of Popery on the one hand, and fanaticism on the other.—But from hence we are not to raise confident assurances, that God will always continue the same prosperity to His church. He hath promised indeed, that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it, that the Faith shall never be wholly destroyed, nor a succession of pastors wanting to preach the word, and administer the sacraments,—but has nowhere engaged, that she shall always enjoy the protection of the civil power, and the blessings of outward peace. External grandeur and happiness is not necessary to the being of a Church, which may be found in the wilderness, as well as in the land of rest,—in an upper chamber, as well as in a stately temple.—Rev. Henry Wharton.

SUFFICIENCY OF GRACE.

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