

ON PRAYING.

The Church Militant has many men of speech, a few of them having the gift of eloquence, fewer still the power to offer public extempore prayers so as to lead the mind of the worshippers to dwell on the spiritual side of life, the verities of the universe, and the great God Himself. The Roman Catholic Church discovered the rarity of this gift quite early, and decreed that the few should serve the many. A liturgy was provided for the clergy, written in stately, unchanging Latin, so that the slow of speech could pray in the language of eloquence, and the dull could think with the thoughts of a passionate piety. The Anglican Church has inherited an affection for a liturgical form of service; and, with few exceptions, very beautiful, very simple, very earnest, and so quite sublime, are the prayers of the Episcopal Church; when not spoiled in the reading, they are mightily impressive. But, to read prayers well or ill is not praying. An earnest spirit will scarcely be content with this mechanical piety, for it must give vent to the thought of the mind and the feeling of the heart, when face to face with Deity, as at no other time. The Puritans were earnest men, and had things to say to the Almighty which the framers of the liturgy had not thought of; so it was put away, and prayer in public was extemporised. The Nonconformist and Methodist Churches of England have the same notion as to those sacred things; they pray, with some few Methodistical exceptions, without a form.

But the happy medium seems not yet to be found. Men use the liturgy who should not, at least not always; and men do not use it all who should. They do not pray, as anyone who has but a slight acquaintance with the clergy must know; they talk a little with the Lord, telling Him many things of time and eternity, as if they knew all, and He but a little. A form is fallen into quite unconsciously; it starts at one point, and, going the round, ends at another, with dull uniformity. On the part of the audience, some go to sleep, some wish they could, while a few cry out in soul agony, "Oh, that the man would pray, would speak out of his experience into the ear and heart of God." But no; there is no wild crying to heaven as of a soul in pain; no subdued and awe-stricken speech, as of a spirit oppressed with a sense of God's presence and holiness; no glad shouting, as of a heart made joyous by the working of mercy; but words running into sentences, and sentences into paragraphs—and nothing more. The early Romans, and the later Anglicans, were right; better enforce a liturgy on all, on even the few who can utter prayer, than force men to pray before the people, who have neither natural gift nor divine ordination for the work.

Prayer is the most difficult exercise to which mortal can turn his powers. Only a few of all the ancient patriarchs and prophets could pray, as far as we may judge from the records given. The Old Testament has many sermons in it; but the reported prayers are few. David was essentially a man of prayer; and the Church has taken to praying in his words. A glance at the royal psalmist will explain that. He was a man of deep and strong passion—of a vast and vivid imagination, which, wandering from the centre to the uttermost fringes of life, clothed all things in garments of heavenly grandeur. Behind the visible he saw the invisible; through the material shone the immaterial; and all things of earth told of the Ruler of all things on earth and in heaven. He was a poet, having a poet's dreamings and power of speech; a poet's fine frenzy, and wild rush of thought. He was also a man of varied experience; suffered and enjoyed as only the few can; had been most highly exalted and most deeply abased; and when over all, and under all, and in all, he saw God, his soul rushed out in words. He spoke from his own mind and heart into the mind and heart of Deity. Moved by joy, or sorrow, or love, or hate, or hope, or despair, he said or sung it out.

A few in these latter times have the same genius. They pray mightily, because they feel deeply and strongly. They have imaginations—a very human experience; a vivid, overwhelming sense of sin and the beauty of holiness; a hate of the evil they see and sometimes do, and a love and desire for goodness. So they talk with God as a child to its mother, and not as a Domine to his class, as is the way with some, or as a courtier flattering a King, as is the way with some others. They pour out the earnest soul in plain but passionate language which rapture, and carry away to the throne of God, the mind and the heart of an audience.

Such men should have no liturgy enforced upon them. It clips their wings, and hinders their loftiest flights. The difference between them and the ordinary preacher is the difference between the poet and the penny-a-liner—between the architect and the stone mason. And in actual practice this difference should be made—the man of genius for prayer should have a liturgy to which he can turn when not in the mood for extempore prayer; and the man who lacks the genius, and uses a liturgy, should be allowed to pray extempore when the rare mood or inspiration is on him. Thus no Church seems to strike the happy medium, or to make even an effort to meet and utilize the variety of talent it has at command. Those will be a blessed people who can be broad enough and free enough, to leave their clergy free to use a ritual,

or not, just as it may suit the mood, or manner, of those who have to lead the devotions of a congregation.

The foregoing remarks have been inspired by the perusal of a book called "Prayers, with a Discourse on Prayer,"* by George Dawson, M.A., of Birmingham, edited by his wife. It is a book of rare excellence, and of great value. George Dawson was in every way a remarkable man. He broke away from the orthodox theology—scoffed at much that was evangelical—was a critic—a vivisectionist as far as dogmas go—and yet few knew how gentle, how tender, how profoundly pious he was. The publication of these prayers will not only ennoble his memory, but will give another evidence of the true power of extempore prayer. Each prayer in the book is based on some event, or thought of his own, or passage of Scripture. It is short, pithy, pure and simple: calm as a rule, yet sometimes strong, earnest, passionate—as if the man had flung his soul into his words. He spoke from his own heart into the heart of God. He prayed, and the congregation must have prayed with him. The language is sublimely simple—the thoughts burn—the sentiments sink down into the mind to live there. They must have been prepared, those prayers; a questionable thing—but they are good, which is beyond question. Clergymen should study this book, it will tell them how Man may feel and express himself before the Great Giver of all good. And, perhaps, it may teach them how to speak in simple, but appropriate, language to Him who hears all true and earnest prayer.

For family devotions this book would be valuable. It will be found to give expression to many and varied feelings; for old and young it has a thought and a voice.

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ON LOVE OF PRAISE.

Addison says: "A wise man is satisfied when he gains his own approbation, a fool when he recommends himself to the applause of those about him," but we think self-approbation in Addison's day must have been much harder to gain, self-conceit not such a besetting sin in that age as it is in ours, or he would hardly have penned those words; in fact, it is his readiness to set our own opinion above that of others which gives rise to so much of that false "principle" spoken of in a recent issue of the SPECTATOR.

But while we do not agree with him that self-satisfaction is any evidence of wisdom, neither do we think that the desire for praise marks the fool; were it so mankind must be one vast assemblage of those interesting personages, for there is no feeling more widespread nor more deeply rooted in the human heart. Without this incentive to exertion, how many of those who have taken their places in the front rank of statesmen, orators, generals, poets, authors, would have remained forever in the shades of obscurity, or never risen above mediocrity; and how many noble deeds and thoughts would have been thus lost to the world! Without this desire for fame, how many of those whose talents best fit them to serve their country in the field or in the senate would spend their days in the indolent enjoyment of retirement rather than share the toils and anxieties of public life! How many deeds of self-denial which the world has never heard of have been prompted by the hope of receiving a word of praise perhaps from but one pair of lips; how many desponding ones have been cheered on to dare and do great things by one word given in time; how many hoping ones have been disappointed and gone back to the depths of despair by one word withheld, we shall never know; but certain we are such things have been and will be again. Surely we may judge motives as well as men by their fruits and what more prolific in good deeds than this?

None will deny that the fear of punishment and the hope of reward are legitimate objects to set before children, yet few would not think him a nobler child who would do a thing because he would be called a good boy than he who would do it because he was threatened with a whipping if he neglected it, or promised a piece of cake if he performed it.

We are persuaded that this motive is not sufficiently set before children either at home or at school. The parent who never praises his child, the teacher who never praises a pupil for duty done will not only have less love but less obedience than he who never fails to give to the deserving a word of commendation. It is not, we acknowledge, the highest of all motives, but there is none so high to which it does not add new intensity. Love of right is nobler, but who acts from love of right behind which does not lurk the hope of praise? We can admire the conduct of the noble Athenian heroes who gave to their country a name among the nations which shall never die, but which of us would follow in their footsteps were we sure that the only reward we should have would be such as they received in their lifetime—fine, imprisonment and banishment? Nay, we rather prefer to think with Tennyson:—

"The path of duty is the way to glory,
He that treads it only thirsting
For the right, and learns to deaden
Love of self, before his journey closes
Shall find the stubborn thistle bursting
Into glossy purples, which out-redden
All voluptuous garden roses."

The path of duty is at best a thorny one; is it just, then, while leaving the thistles which we cannot remove, to pluck each blossom ere it bursts, and rob it of all brightness which might cheer the toiler on his way?

True, like all other good things it may be abused; we may regard that as praise which is not worth the name, and miss the substance in pursuing the shadow. That the remedy is not to be found in decrying the real article, but in learning and in teaching others to discriminate between them. True praise will always be marked by one quality—sincerity—which alone distinguishes it from flattery, that spurious coin which serves but to show forth the baseness of