

THE COLONIAL CHURCHMAN.

"BUILT UPON THE FOUNDATION OF THE APOSTLES AND PROPHETS, JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF BEING THE CHIEF CORNER STONE. Eph. 2 c. 20 v.

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ESSAY ON THE LITURGY.

ESSAY I.—Continued.

"O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness."

Psalm xcvi. 9.

From the historical view, we pass on to the illustration of the several portions, as they stand in the book of common prayer, to point out the propriety and spiritual nature of the service; to shew that it possesses the 'beauty of holiness,' contemplated by the psalmist in the worship of God; and, if possible, to persuade each member of our congregations to a spiritual use of it, when he comes to appear before God in the sanctuary.

I would call the reader's attention, in the first place, to the different attitudes of body assumed in the course of the service. Is it asked, why we kneel in prayer? We answer! So prayed Solomon, at the dedication of the temple: 'he kneeled down upon his knees before all the congregation of Israel.' So prayed Daniel: 'He kneeled three times a day, and prayed.' So exhorted David: 'O come let us worship, and fall down, and kneel before the Lord our Maker.' So prayed Jesus Christ in his agony: 'And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down and prayed.' So prayed St Paul, when he took leave of his flock at Ephesus: 'He kneeled down and prayed.' So prayed Stephen in the hour of death: 'And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. So prayed Peter, when he raised the dead woman of Joppa: 'He put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed.' We apprehend these are sufficient to vindicate our practice of kneeling in prayer; and there is, moreover, a fitness and propriety in this posture, which perhaps belong to no other. It is a posture of abstraction from surrounding objects, which is of itself a sufficient indication of a wandering heart, so it is impossible for a man to engage in earnest prayer, while his attention is engaged by other objects.

Let me here remark how improper and indecent is the careless habit of sitting in the time of prayer, which has been thoughtlessly adopted in many of our congregations. It is impossible for men to pray, while their attention is attracted by a multitude of objects sitting before them, and the appeal might be made to themselves, whether they are conscious of one act of mental devotion, while they remain in that posture. There is neither beauty nor holiness in it.

Is it asked, on the other hand, why we stand during the offering of praise? The answer is ready; giving praise is an act of joy: and by the erection of the body, it is designed to express the elevation of the soul, when we praise and give thanks. It was the office of the priests under the Jewish dispensation, 'to stand every morning to praise and thank the Lord, and likewise at even.' David exhorts the people in one of his psalms to 'praise the Lord; standing in the courts of the Lord;' and when Solomon and all the people offered sacrifices at the dedication, and the priests sounded their trumpets before them, 'all Israel stood still.' To kneel in prayer, and to stand in praise, are not merely arbitrary directions for which no reasons can be given: they are, as one expresses it 'the rubrics of nature;' for we naturally express the affections of the soul, by some significant acts of the body. Do men weep when their souls are elevated with joy? or do they

smile in the confession of their sins? The framers of our liturgy presumed that bodily worship was a helper of spiritual worship: they supposed men would be affected by what met the eye, as well as by that which met the ear, and arranged the services of the church accordingly.

Is it asked, why, in our worship, the people respond to the voice of the minister, and audibly join in the service? It is because social worship seems to require, that the people should bear an active part. We speak of this peculiarity of our church with great confidence. We think it an excellence, the loss of which could not be atoned for by any form of service, from which the voice of the people should be excluded. To lend fire and animation to the worship, and move the hearts of a congregation as the heart of one man, they are called on to lift up their voices; sometimes, as in the collects, and the prayers or adorations which have been offered, expressing their assent by an audible and devout amen; sometimes, as in the versicles, echoing the petition which the priest has made, or enforcing it with new considerations; sometimes, as in the litanies, when the minister has offered the suffrage, taking the words out of his mouth, and uttering the deprecation, or the entreaty; and sometimes, as in the hymns, the prayers, and the doxologies, responding in alternate verse, the praises of God, the desires of men, the holiness and homage, the faith and hopes, and charity of religion—thus exhibiting an humble imitation of the worship of heaven; in which, we are told, the seraphim 'cry one to another.' Thus was God worshipped by minister and people, in the Jewish Church of old, thus did the saints of the christian church adore him in her purest ages: thus is He worshipped by the vast majority of the churches at the present day; and thus is he worshipped by the heavenly host. And permit me to add, that if we would teach our children to join in these responses with solemnity, it would add materially to 'the beauty of holiness' apparent in our liturgy, and exemplify in our congregations the inspired declaration, 'out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou perfected praise.'

Are we desired to give a reason for the public reading of the scriptures? The reason appears on the face of the practice, and we should think our service very imperfect without it. If the scriptures were read every sabbath day in the synagogues; if Jesus Christ did the same, when he taught in them; if St. Paul gave charge that his epistles should be read in the churches; and if they are the fountain of all religious truth, and 'are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness;' and if they are able to 'make us wise unto salvation,' then let them ever lie open in the sacred desk, and be read in the hearing of the people. Whatever some fastidious tastes may prefer, sermonizing is but a poor substitute for the pure word of God. The streams of eternal life may be muddled in their course by human officiousness, but the fountain is always pure.

I would conclude the present essay by a single remark, which I presume the reader will find worthy his attention.

If he wishes to acquire a thorough relish for our forms of worship, and make them the instruments of his devotion to Almighty God, it is absolutely necessary that he should bear an active part.

My own observations, and I may add, my own experience, have taught me, that those complaints we sometimes hear of the tediousness and inanimation of our service, proceed from those who come to the sanctuary rather as spectators of our worship, than as worshippers themselves; and that every sentiment of this kind would be done away,

by just taking a book, and bearing a part in the praises of God. Such worshippers mistake entertainment for devotion; and when their feelings have been touched by a pathetic sentiment, or a happy stroke of invention, they have worshipped God. Hence, they are oppressed with a sense of weariness, unless their attention is kept alive by something new, and very wrongly attribute to the imperfection of the service, what, is strictly chargeable on their own deadness of spirit. To such objectors it will be proper to remark, that, without a devotional spirit, no style of worship in heaven or on earth, could please them long. The sound of Gabriel's lyre would pall upon their ear, and their spirits would droop and tire in the hearing of that unceasing cry, 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty.'

I am aware that every liberal allowance must be made for those, who have been accustomed to worship God in a different way; and indeed, I can hardly conceive that a stranger to the service of our sanctuary, would be pleased with it at first. Habit is a second nature; and we can hardly see our religious habits contravened, without feeling that something must be wrong. But the charm which binds the attachment of churchmen to their communion, is, that their liturgy improves more and more on acquaintance; that while they consider devotion the very first of duties in the house of God, they always feel secure of a scriptural and animating form of prayer, and that many of the hymns in which they chant the praises of God below, are sung by the church triumphant above.

ESSAY II.

We propose in the present number, to offer a few remarks on the several portions of the liturgy in succession; referring our readers for more extensive information, to the works of Sparrow, Wheatley, Shepherd, Comber, and others, who have treated the subject at large.

That we may not rush unprepared to the sacred office of divine worship, our attention is arrested by a sentence, or two from holy writ, designed to reclaim our wandering thoughts, and fix them on the work before us. 'Keep thy foot,' says the wise man, 'when thou goest to the house of God: be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thy heart be hasty to utter any thing before God; for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.'—Have you entered into the courts of the Lord, without a proper reverence for the dread Being in whose presence you stand? 'The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.' Are you a formalist?—Rend your hearts, and not your garments, and turn to the Lord your God. Have you adopted the spirit of the self-righteous pharisee? 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.' Are you grieved and wearied with the burden of your sins? 'To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him.' In this manner these selections adapted to every possible variety of character, and form a very proper introduction to the services that follow.

The exhortation is a very solemn address, intended to remind us of the purposes for which we are assembled. We do not go to the house of God to hear an eloquent sermon, nor to play the critic on human performances; but, to 'acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and wickedness—to set forth the most worthy praises of God, hear his most holy word, and to ask those things which are requisite and necessary, as well for the body as the soul.' The chief design of this address, is, 'to instruct the ignorant, to admonish the negligent, to support the