CHURCH REFORM.

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CHAP. IV.

PUBLIC WORSHIP AND RELIGIOUS SERVICES OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

The public worship and religious services of the Church of England are the next subject which I propose to consider, in handling Church Reform. I approach the subject with a deep sense of its difficulty. I am conscious that I walk over the field of a hundred fights, and tread on the ashes of a hundred fires. The story of the Hampton Court and Savoy Conferences is fresh in my mind. I cannot hope to throw much light on a controverted matter which for two centuries has baffled far greater men than myself. But I will not turn away from the subject because of its difficulty. It is one which (unlike Episcopacy, Convocation, and Cathedrals) meets every Churchman every Sunday of his life.

The object of all religious services is a point that need hardly be stated. The edification of all true Christians, the information of the ignorant, the awakening of the careless, the general helping heaven-ward of all who worship,—this, I presume, is the end for which all religious services are framed. And I suppose it is needless to add that a service misses its mark if it only suits a small minority, and not the majority of those who profess to use it.

The provision which the Church of England makes for all who worship within her pale is so well known that it need not be described very fully. Every one knows the "Book of Common Prayer." No English volume in existence, excepting always the Bible, is so well known as the Liturgy or Prayer-book. To enter into details about the contents of the Liturgy, to describe the Order of Morning and Evening Prayer, would be mere waste of time. I take it for granted that every reader of these papers understands "the Prayer-book." The only question I want to discuss is this,—"Can the religious services provided by the Church of England be reformed?"—I answer boldly that they can, and I will proceed to show in what way.

It will clear the road and prevent misunderstanding if I state distinctly what I *do not mean* when I talk of "reforming" our public worship. There are thousands of worthy Churchmen who shiver, and are ready to faint, or go into fits, at the very idea of Prayer-book reform! For the relief of these gentlemen's minds, and the maintenance of their bodily health, let me begin by stating clearly what my ideas are not. I wish to make it plain that in writing about reform of our public worship, I do not write as an enemy, but as a friend, to the Liturgy of the Church of England.

(1) I do not admit for a moment that the Prayer-book is an unsound or Popish book, because I wish its services to be reformed. Nothing of the kind! In spite of all the loose assertions of Nonconformists and Ritualists, I maintain that the Prayer-book, rightly interpreted, is sound, Protestant, and Evangelical. A Protestant and Evangelical interpretation alone, in my judgment, can reconcile the Liturgy with the Articles and Homilies, and with the known opinions of its compilers. If men are so stupid and illogical as to persist in saying that every one who thinks so because he deems it doctrinally unsound, I cannot help it. I am bound to find men in arguments, but not to find them in brains. That the English Prayer-book, fairly and honestly interpreted, comparing statement with statement, is Protestant and not Popish, is, to my mind, clear as noon-day. This is a position which I am prepared to defend anywhere against the world. But, for all that, I think the Prayer-book Services might be reformed.

(2) I have not the slightest wish to substitute extemporaneous prayer for the Liturgy, because I wish our Liturgical worship to be reformed. Nothing of the kind! If all men prayed extempore always as some men pray sometimes, there might be some thing said for giving up the Prayer-book and adopting free prayer. But an ounce of fact is worth a pound of theory. I have been in Scotland for many weeks at a time, and have often heard the prayers of Presbyterian ministers in public worship. I willingly admit that I have heard excellent extempore prayers from their lips. Nevertheless I never heard them, even the best of them, without feeling thankful for the English Prayer-book! The man who supposes I want to get rid of the Liturgy altogether is entirely mistaken.

(3) I have no wish to see anything used except the Prayer-book in the reading-desk of the Church of England. The *liberty* which some plead for is a dangerous liberty, and would cut both ways. Clergymen of Romish or sceptical proclivities would use such "liberty" for the promulgation of their own peculiar views. The Breviary or other Roman offices would be introduced on one side. Semi-deistical or semi-Socinian prayers might creep in on another. And all this would be done under the name of "liberty!" I dread the consequences of such liberty. With all my desire to see our public worship reformed, I do not want to see anything allowed in our reading-desks except the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer.

(4) Last, but not least, when I talk of reforming our services, I do not mean liturgical revision. In saying this, I would not be misunderstood. There are doubtless many words and expressions in the Prayer-book which I should like to see altered. They are liable, as they now stand, to be misconstrued, wrested, and misinterpreted, partly from inherent obscurity of meaning, and partly from the unfair handling of prejudiced, unlearned, or unstable men. I would gladly see all such words and expressions removed. But there is not the slightest chance of this being done. A Royal Commission for Liturgical revision would include Ritualists and Neologians as well as Evangelicals. From such a Commission I should expect nothing but evil. It would do more harm than good, if it did anything at all. In short—"I would rather bear the ills I know, than flee to others that I know not of." Looking calmly at the condition of the Church of England, about the last thing I should like to see would be a Commission for reconstructing, revising, or adding to, our Liturgy. Without a special miracle, such as we have no right to expect, the poor Prayer-book would come forth from its hands (if, indeed, it ever came forth again alive) completely marred and spoiled,—

"Monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens, cui lumen ademptum."

But now, having cleared out of the way what I do not want, let me endeavour to state clearly what I do want. What do I mean when I say that our public worship needs reform? What reforms would improve it? What are the reforms which seem desirable, considering the times in which we live, and the state of a vast proportion of our fellow countrymen? I will offer an answer to these questions.

I. I begin by saying that our liturgical services need a large measure of diversion, abbreviation, and simplification. They are too long—they ought to be shortened. They crowd too many things together—they ought to be divided. They are not sufficiently easy in arrangement—their order should be more simple. If we want the Prayer-book to go down to the people, and become "the book of the people,"—if we want it to be really valued, loved, and understood,—we should divide, shorten, and simplify its services.

I cannot, in the narrow limits of a paper like this, go fully into all the details of this subject. I must be content with supplying a few general outlines of what I mean.

(1) I submit, in the first place, that *our Morning Service is far too long*. Consisting, as it now does, of a good many prayers and collects, four or five Psalms, two chapters of Scripture, the Litany, the Communion service, and a sermon, its length is injudicious and unwise. It may suit the minority of Churchmen, no doubt, but that it does not suit the vast majority I am quite sure. To the old, the sickly, the children, the uneducated, the labourers, to many of the farmers and men in trade or business, it is too long to be profitable. It is requiring too much of flesh and blood to expect them to enjoy it. After a careful observation of this subject for twenty-seven years, I have come to a very decided conclusion about it. Speaking personally, for myself I do not object to our Morning Service. But speaking for others, I am quite certain that many are kept away from Church by the inordinate length of our Morning Service, or are so wearied that they never worship more than once, if they attend Church in the morning.

I suggest the following reform. Let the officiating minister of every parish Church, or other consecrated place of worship, have full liberty to shorten the Morning Service by omitting the Litany and the Communion Service. In Churches where this plan is adopted, let the Litany and Communion Offices, with a lesson out of Scripture, be used every alternate Sunday as the Morning Service, instead of the morning prayers. This course would supply an answer to the obvious objection that the proposed reform would rob some people altogether of a very valuable part of our Church Service.

(2) I submit, in the next place, that *our afternoon Service is longer than is convenient* for the circumstances of thousands of country parishes. Few persons but those who know it by experience, have any idea of the difficulties of rural Churchmen in this matter. Myriads of them in every county come to Church every Sunday afternoon under great difficulties. They have miles to walk, and often over wet fields and muddy roads. They have work that must be done after Church before the sun goes down, horses to be attended to, cows to be milked, cattle to be fed, and a score of little things beside. These worthy fellows, with their wives and children, deserve to be considered.

The reform I suggest is as follows. Let the officiating minister of every Church have liberty to shorten the Afternoon Service. Let him do it by substituting the Litany if it has not been read in the morning, or by omitting the Psalms and one of the Lessons, when the Litany has been read in the morning. If this course did not secure to the Church larger and more wakeful afternoon congregations, I should be greatly surprised.

(3) I submit, in the third place, that every clergyman who has a third service in his Church on Sunday, should be allowed to make it *as short and simple as possible*, provided always that it is taken out of the Liturgy. Let it suffice to use four or five collects, one or two hymns, and a chapter of Scripture, and let this with a sermon compose the service. The idea of such a brief Church Service may frighten and horrify some of my readers. I beg to remind them that this is almost the same service that is already used at St. Mary's, Oxford, at the University sermon, every Sunday afternoon!

(4) I submit, in the fourth place, that *the Baptismal Service of our Church is far too long*, and that the length of it does immense harm. I am not, be it remembered, saying one word at present on its doctrinal sense. I only say, it is too long. It is not simple enough, and this want of simplicity makes many positively dislike it. I am one of those who would like to see every baptism publicly administered in the face of the congregation. I should like to see all the congregation taking an interest in the admission of every new member, and helping by prayer. I should like to see every parent coming to the font with his child, and presenting it himself. It is vain to expect all this, while our Baptismal Service is what it is. We may preach, and exhort, and give tracts, and talk about it, but we shall not get all that we want. The excessive length of the service makes it most inconvenient to introduce it in the middle of a full congregation. The sponsorial questions positively frighten and keep away many people, explain them as you may.

I suggest the following reform. Let the minister of every church have liberty to shorten the Baptismal Service very considerably, when any child is publicly baptized. Let it suffice to require the simplest profession from parents, and, after using two or three Collects, to sprinkle water in the name of the Trinity. As for those who want the whole service read, they must be content to have it privately, when the congregation has gone away. Let those who please be filled with indignation at the idea of such a reform as this. I defy any one to prove that the whole Baptismal Service is essential to the validity of Baptism. The "private service" of our own Liturgy proves that the Church considers sprinkling of water, and a prayer, without any sponsors, to be the only things absolutely necessary. I honour and reverence the Sacrament of Baptism, as a blessed ordinance appointed by Christ. I want to see it once more valued and honoured publicly by modern Churchmen. But I am thoroughly satisfied that our present mode of administering Baptism makes it a most unpopular sacrament among Churchmen. I want the feelings of the vast majority to be considered in this matter, and not the feelings of a comparatively small minority. I confidently assert that the reform I suggest would be received with unboundeded satisfaction by an immense number of Churchmen.

(5) I submit, in the fifth place, that the administration of the Lord's Supper ought not to be left in *the vague, uncertain, disputable, debateable position* which it now occupies. I do not want a single word of the Communion Service altered. I am perfectly content with the service as it is. But I do want to see this holy ordinance no longer defiled by the strifes and diversities of ministers, and in the name of peace I cry aloud for reform!

I suggest that in no Church should the Lord's Supper ever be administered less than once a month. Whenever the Lord's Supper is administered, let no other service be used except the Litany, a sermon, and the Communion Office. This would be an immense boon to many!—In the administration of the Lord's Supper, let the dress of the minister be strictly and accurately defined by a rubrical direction, and let the slightest appearance of a sacrificial vestment be positively forbidden.—Let the position, gestures, postures, and attitude of the officiating minister be carefully prescribed and defined, and let any semblance of adoration of the elements be made impossible.—Let every minister have full liberty to administer the elements to a whole rail at once, and to use the words of administration in the plural number. This is the plan which in many cases is positively necessary for convenience sake, and which many infinitely prefer. This is the plan which our Lord himself adopted at the first communion. *He certainly used words in the plural number*, and certainly did not address the Apostles Peter, James, John, and their companions, individually and one by one.—Last, but not least, let every minister have full liberty to have the Lord's Supper in the evening at his discretion, without being reviled, snubbed, bullied, trampled on, and called over the coals for doing so. It is quite certain that the evening is the time which in many places most suits the poor. If we want the poor to be communicants, we ought to consult their convenience. Above all, no one can ever get ever the simple fact that the first Lord's Supper *was in the evening, and was immediately after a meal*.

I might easily add to these suggestions. But I fear wearying my readers, and I have said enough to show the nature of the reforms which I want to see effected. The principles I have laid down might be applied to the Marriage Service and the Burial Service. The Service for the Churching of Women I would withdraw from our *public* worship altogether, and let it only be read in private. Shortening and division are the reform I want for our liturgical services. *Liberty to shorten* is what I want for our clergy. The manner in which such liberty is exercised should, of course, be entered into a book every Sunday, and annually submitted to the Bishop and his Council, that they may express an opinion about it if they feel it needful. Subject to such superintendence, I think this liberty might be safely allowed, and I am unable to see that it could possibly do much harm.

II. With regard to Church of England religious services in unlicensed or unconsecrated places, I have but little to say. They are at present so few in number, compared to our liturgical services, that I need not dwell long upon them. Reform is not the word to apply to them. In every diocese they ought not merely to be tolerated, permitted, allowed, and sanctioned; they ought to be adopted, cherished, held up to honour, commended, and urged upon the clergy of every large parish throughout the district.

The man who supposes that every Englishman in our large overgrown semi-heathen parishes will at once appreciate a Prayer-book service, the moment it is put before him, must have taken leave of his senses. There are myriads of people in this land who neither know, nor care, nor feel anything about the Prayer-book, or the Bible, or any religion at all. To expect these people to appreciate our elaborate Liturgy is simply ridiculous and unreasonable. They must be approached with religious services adapted to their capacity. The first elements of Christianity must be placed before them. We must go to work as St. Paul went to work at Ephesus or Corinth. We must go down to them with the simplest kind of worship, a hymn, a chapter, an extempore prayer, and an extempore sermon. If we are not prepared to use such tools as these we may say "good-bye" to the idea of ever reaching the working classes in England. To suppose that at one bound they will rise to an appreciation of our venerable Liturgy is the acme of folly.

I suggest that in every parish throughout the land non-liturgical services in school-rooms, halls, warehouses, large rooms, or barns, should be regularly taken as the rule, and not the exception. I suggest that instead of beginning with costly consecrated buildings, and reading on Sunday "Dearly beloved brethren," and the whole morning and afternoon prayers, we should make it part of our Church system to go down to our people, and by simple services educate them for a higher style of worship. I know well that hundreds of our clergy are already doing this very thing, and doing it with great success. May God bless and prosper them! But the reform that I want is the authoritative adopting and encouragement of these elementary services in every direction. Let the English clergy be encouraged to show they can use simple apostolic weapons as well as any clergy in the world, and that they do not need a Prayer-book or a surplice in order to conduct a religious service. God alone can give success in spiritual work. But I have great faith in the power of simple Scriptural truth. If the dangerous classes in England saw our clergy going about with nothing but their Bibles, leaving their Prayer-books at home, and asking for nothing but a barn or a warehouse, and liberty of speech, without any official dress at all, I believe it would arrest their attention. I am greatly mistaken if they were not greatly pleased at the sight. If the people of this land are to be evangelized and rescued from sin, immorality, scepticism, infidelity, and indifference, our reform must begin at this point. We must have a wide-spread adoption of simple, non-liturgical, extempore services in every large parish. The Bishops should throw themselves heart and soul into the movement, and not only permit such services, but recommend them, press them on the clergy, and take part in them themselves. Fifty debates in Convocation would never do so much good to the Church of England as half-a-dozen Bishops preaching the Gospel, and praying extempore, in every large parish in their dioceses, without lawn sleeves, and in the style and manner of St. Paul. This would, indeed, be a grand reform!

I leave my subject here. I have neither time nor space to go farther into it. I only want my readers to think out the whole question by themselves, and to view it in all its bearings. My main object in writing these papers is to set men thinking. If I can only do that, I shall be abundantly satisfied.

For saying what I have said, many will regard me as a radical, a chartist, a leveller, a foe to the Prayer-book, and an enemy of the Church of England. They may think what they please. Time will show who is right and who is wrong; who are the Church's enemies, and who are the Church's friends. In admiration of the Prayer-book, and loyalty to the Church of England, I will give place to no man. It is precisely because I love both the one and the other, and want to see them live and not die, that I advocate reform. I write all the papers I now write, not as an enemy, but as a friend. I want to preserve the Church of England. I want to "strengthen the things which remain which are ready to die."

Yet those who will say that we ought to "educate" the people up to a right appreciation of the Prayer-book worship as it it, and wait patiently. It is all fine talking. We have waited long enough, and are losing ground every year. "While the corn is growing the steed is starving." Papists, Infidels, Secularists, to say nothing of other sects of Christians, get hold of our people, while we are sitting still, and trying to hatch a proper feeling for the Liturgy. We cannot afford to wait. Better a thousand times reform our worship, and make it more elastic and popular, and thus go down to our people, and meet their spiritual wants.

Let those who will regard the slightest change as a sacrilege, and fill the air with cries and protestations at the very idea of altering our religious services. Let them stiffly entrench themselves under the banner of that old cry, "The Prayer-book, the whole Prayer-book, and nothing but the Prayer-book." I venture, with all respect for their feelings, to hint that this famous cry is out of date. It is as useless as the cry of the Ephesians when they cried, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." The world is marching on. The days are past when anything is venerable merely because it is old. If Church of England worship will not keep pace with the times the Church will be left behind in the race, and the Nonconformists and Nothingarians will fill up the ground.

(1) I ask my objectors whether there is not an *a priori* probability that a Prayer-book service, compiled 300 years ago, may not in many respects be unsuited to the wants of 1870. The times have altered. Education has made rapid strides. Unlimited toleration has entirely changed the position of the Church of England. Antiquity goes for nothing. Usefulness is the only test. Everything is tried on its own merits. It is surely not too much to suppose that our invaluable Liturgy may be rearranged so as to be better adapted to the times.

(2) I ask my objectors to remember that the "Preface" to the Prayer-book itself does actually suppose the possibility of future alterations and changes. Let them mark these words: "The particular forms of Divine worship, and the rites and ceremonies appointed to be used therein, being things in their own nature *indifferent and alterable*, and so acknowledged; it is but reasonable that upon weighty and important considerations, according to the various exigency of times and occasions, such *changes and alterations* should be made therein as to those that are in place of authority should, from time to time, seem necessary or expedient." This is sound speech that cannot be condemned. It is not I that say this, be it remembered, but the "Preface of our own Book of Common Prayer."

(3) I ask my objectors to look at the facts before them in England, and to ponder them well. Vast multitudes of our people stand aloof from the Established Church, and *will have nothing to do with her*. An incessant effort is made by Infidels, Sceptics, Papists, and Secularists, as well as by Nonconformists of all kinds, to get hold of these people. Shall the Church of England alone stand still and attempt no reform? Shall we rely entirely on our dignified position as an Established Church, and venture nothing to maintain our ground? Shall we do nothing to popularize our services, and adapt them to the necessities of our day? I for one say, "God forbid." I would rather sacrifice my own private likings in many particulars of our religious services, than refuse changes that might do good to millions of my fellow-countrymen. A rigid, unbending, "*non possumus*" line of policy, no doubt, sounds very heroic, grand, and fine. But I doubt extremely whether it is wise and safe in 1870. Better concede something than lose all.

(4) I ask my objectors, once for all, to look at their Bibles, and think for a moment what St. Paul would do if he rose from the dead and appeared in our times. Would he insist on every jot and tittle of our Prayer-book service being used always and everywhere in the face of our huge semi-heathen population? Would he advise no alterations, no concessions, no attempts to meet wants, no effort to suit our worship to the exigency of the times? I am sure that no sensible man can really doubt what his line would be.

(5) I ask my objectors, last of all, to remember that the Bible nowhere commands us expressly to use no religious service except that of a Liturgy,—that for eighteen hundred years souls have been born again, edified, and sanctified without a Liturgy,—that men like Luther, Melancthon, Calvin, Bengel, Chalmers, M'Cheyne, Judson, have been mighty Christians without a Liturgy,—that at this very moment good is being done, sinners are being converted, and Christ's kingdom is being built up, by the agency of men who never use a Liturgy. I ask them to remember all these things, and ponder them well.

And then, when they have pondered these things, I hope they will not condemn me as a heretic, a fanatic, a leveller, and revolutionary enthusiast, when, for the sake of the Church of England for the sake of the Liturgy itself, and above all for the sake of souls, I plead for reforms in the public worship of the Church of England.

—A Jerusalem telegram reports the first religious difficulty which has yet resulted from the new Infallibility dogma in the East. The Armenian Cathedral of St. James, in the Holy City, contains a large collection of relics, which are greatly venerated alike by its own and the Latin communities. The Latin clergy have in consequence been permitted hitherto to celebrate mass in the buildings on St. James' day, but this year the Armenian Patriarch refused the usual permission, alleging that he could not lend his church to a clergy whose head had just declared himself infallible.