

PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP.

Other things being equal, that form of Christian worship will be the best which preserves and reflects with the greatest faithfulness the characteristic spirit or genius of the Christian religion.

As a religion, then, pure Christianity wears these features, at least, which ought, all of them, to be reflected in its worship—(1.) Completed revelation of God; (2.) Spirituality; (3.) Recognition of the equality of all men; and (4.) Joyous consciousness of redemption as an accomplished fact. A very few words must suffice to suggest how each of these factors on the problem of an ideal Christian cultus.

As the religion of true and full illumination, touching the relations of God to man, Christianity is at the same time a religion of the spirit, and not of the senses. It brings each man as a spiritual intelligence into the most immediate communion with God, who is a Spirit, that is attainable in this life, dispensing therefore to the utmost degree with material media or outward helps to devotion. That this feature of our faith is meant to be conspicuous in its worship is left to no inference, but was expressly asserted by its Founder in His great words beside the well of Jacob: "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship Him"—John iv. 23, 24.

The spirituality of Christian worship leads us, I conceive, to at least three conclusions respecting it.

In the first place, it is independent of sacred localities, or seasons, as well as of material channels of grace. The connection in which occur those words of our Lord just quoted, makes it plain that Christianity is no religion of holy places. As little can its worship be restricted (except from motives of convenience) to holy times. Above all, every idea of material media as essential conductors of the Divine blessing to the worshipper, or of acceptable worship to the Deity, must be surrendered. Here we touch the deep root of that exaggerated confidence which the Sacramentalist and the Ritualist betray. It lies in a defective apprehension of the essential spirituality of the intercourse which Christ has opened between man and God. Of any material vehicle may our worship avail itself as an accidental support; to no material vehicle is it confined as a necessary medium.

A second canon for worship emerges, if its spirituality is to be guarded. Cultus is the expression of inward devotion; and all expression implies what is outward or material. But to protect in our cultus the spiritual element, let its external form be so regulated as only to express, and by expressing aid, the spiritual emotion of worship, nowise to distract or hamper or corrupt it. In the application of such a rule, many practical difficulties will be encountered; but the justice of the rule itself cannot be questioned. The accessories of worship—its metrical and musical utterances, for example, its architectural environment, its postures and drapery; these things are in a spiritual religion permissible, only when, and in so far as, they sustain in its purity and strength what is spiritual in the worship of the worshipper. When they pass that limit they are plainly out of place. Their tendency then is to materialize, and so to degrade the worship. How much of what is sensuous may be safely permitted in the external forms of a spiritual religion, must depend partly on the training, and partly on the temperament, of particular bodies of worshippers. What would be innocuous in one community might conceivably lead in another to undue attention to externals, or to the decay of spiritual feeling altogether.

So long as human nature is not uniform, so long will men tend either to as much ceremonialism as is at all permissible, or to as little of it as is at all practicable. The Ritualist and the Puritan "will never cease out of the land." To either extreme there attaches a danger. A cultus overlaid with sensuous pomp tends to substitute forms for real devotion. On the other hand, a severely simple service, in which the expression of worship and the aids to it are reduced to a minimum, is apt to enfeeble devotion for lack of that support which all genuine feeling finds in its own healthy and appropriate utterance. The two dangers, however,

are scarcely of equal gravity. The latter is a danger of defect; and the more robust and masculine the piety of the Church is, the less will it feel such a defect. The former is a danger of deterioration, devotional feeling degenerating either into formalism or into superstition; a danger this to which human nature is peculiarly exposed, and from which spiritual religion has frightfully suffered. Besides, a religion whose essence is most spiritual demands only the most simple expression. On the whole, therefore, safety seems to incline to the rule—rather less of the sensuous and outward in cultus than more. Rather a service bald of ornament, and severe in its expression of religious life, than one which even tends to any excessive cultivation of the outward form.

The third inference to be drawn from the spirituality of our religion is the freedom of its cultus from obligatory forms, and from uniformity. To recall the minute details of ceremonial with which the books of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers are charged, and to compare these with the New Testament, is to feel at once the enormous interval which divides a religion of ritual from a religion of principles. Our Lord's prescriptions under the head of worship may be told in a sentence: He dictated no liturgy, save a very brief prayer, and He appointed no ritual, save two very simple symbolical actions. The letters of His apostles do not enjoin any form of service; and what they indicate of the forms employed in the Churches which they founded is as meagre in its amount as it is casual in its occurrence. At a thanksgiving prayer, which probably accompanied the Supper, the congregation responded "Amen"—1 Cor. xiv. 16; competent brethren delivered warm, yet rational, addresses for the profit of the rest—1 Cor. xiv. 3; sacred verses of some sort were sung—Eph. v. 19; apostolic letters were publicly read when received—Col. iv. 16; love feasts were held—Jude 12; and the disciples saluted each other on certain occasions with a kiss—Rom. xvi. 16; 1 Peter v. 14. If we except what was miraculous, these few incidental notices may be said to exhaust our information respecting the primitive and apostolic worship for all Christian ages, or to affirm that beyond such casual items our worship must never travel, is surely to misunderstand the spirit of the New Testament. In point of fact, the majority of these apostolic parts of service have actually disappeared from our Churches. We know no longer either the kiss of peace or the feast of charity. Our prophesying is no longer done by a succession of volunteers. Audible responses at the close of public prayer, although the most venerable and Scriptural of usages, has strangely vanished, at least from Presbyterian worship. To claim that we rigidly follow in every detail Scriptural example is on the face of it a false claim. To demand a Scriptural sanction for every detail of our present cultus is to demand an impossibility.

The truth is, that while musical praise, common prayer, and edifying discourse, together with the sacraments, must remain, from the nature of the case, the permanent elements of Christian cultus, no canon for their detailed management has been described except two of the most general description: "Let all things be done decently and in order;" "Let all things be done unto edifying"—Cor. xiv. 16-40. Order and profit are the parallel lines within which the Church has been left free to move; within these lines her freedom results from her spirituality, and is to be conditioned by it. To dictate to every congregation or community of believers one unelastic compulsory order of service or liturgical form of prayer, to encumber the free and simple worship of the Church with a multitude of wearisome ceremonies which minister to pageant rather than profit; to make a crime out of trifling divergences in details, as if Christians were tied to some painful and scrupulous law of ceremonies; or to split the unity of the visible Church of Christ on unimportant matters of ritual—are any of these things in harmony with the liberty or with the spirituality of the New Testament religion?—*J. Oswald Dykes in the Catholic Presbyterian.*

"UNWORTHILY."

This word used in relation to the Lord's Supper, has been a terror to many minds, and has kept many away from the Lord's table. It occurs in 1 Cor. xi. 27: "Wherefore, whosoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." Again, in verse

29, "For he that eateth and drinketh [unworthily], eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body." I quote from the version of King James, which is less accurate here than usual. The word "unworthily," in the 29th verse, I have included in brackets, as it does not belong there at all. It is not in the original.

But what does the word "unworthily" mean? Observe carefully, the language is not "whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord *being unworthy*." If our own personal worthiness were the requisite qualification, who would venture to approach the Lord's table? We are all unworthy. There is no worthiness in ourselves, but in Christ alone. What, then, is the real meaning of the adverb unworthily? Doubtless it means, "in an unworthy manner." The apostle makes his meaning plain in the 20-22 verses. It appears that in the Corinthian church the Lord's Supper had become an occasion of festivity and of reveling, not very unlike a modern picnic. All this was unsuited to the occasion; and the reflection which the ordinance demands and suggests, the discerning of the body, was an impossibility in the midst of such disorder. It is no wonder that the apostle rebuked all this in the most pointed language. Well might he say that the one eating and drinking thus, ate and drank condemnation to himself. This surely was eating and drinking unworthily, that is, in an unworthy manner.

The word "unworthily," therefore, does not apply, was never meant to apply, to those timid persons who are conscious of their own personal unworthiness. Such persons have in this word, and in this whole passage, no warning to stay away from the Lord's Supper.—*The Standard.*

A STRANGE FUNERAL SERMON.

The deceased had long been renowned throughout that part of the country for his wickedness. His intellectual abilities were of no mean order; his property was considerable, and he had belonged to a highly respectable family; advantages which he used most assiduously in the service of his master. By the practice of every kind of dissipation he had achieved an evil notoriety, and gloried in being considered the most fascinating and dangerous *row* in the country. This being so, his associates resolved upon giving him a funeral worthy of his reputation.

As one means of insuring this, they invited one of the most eminent Presbyterian ministers in the region to deliver the funeral discourse. To the surprise of many, after some little hesitation, he consented. On the day and at the hour appointed, the country church was crowded to overflowing by an assembly composed of the relatives, friends and companions of the deceased, together with a mixed multitude drawn from far and near by curiosity to hear what such a minister could find to say of such a man.

Punctual to the moment, the tall form of the Rev. Dr. ascended the pulpit, and the service began. There was first the reading of the Scriptures. Then followed a prayer, subdued and tender, for the family and relatives of the deceased. But the announcement of the text fell like a clap of thunder upon the assembly. It was from Luke xvi. 23—"And in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torment." The sermon was a most pungent and powerful exhibition of the character, course and end of a wicked man. It held the assembly spell-bound to the very last word; but there was in it not a single direct allusion to the person whose obsequies they had come there to celebrate.

In silence and in deep solemnity the congregation dispersed after the sermon was finished. Some were indignant, but the attempt to excite odium against the preacher was a failure. It was generally thought that in what he had done he was governed by a sense of duty. He was said to have stated afterwards that when he was invited to preach on that occasion, he had determined to decline, but, in answer to prayer, received a message which he believed to be from God:—"Go—and preach the preaching that I bid thee."

AN hour spent with a good book is always so much solid and substantial gain. Fire, flood, mistake or other accident may rob us of our material possessions, but they cannot get at the treasures of the immortal mind. But the book must be a good one, written by some one who has "dipped his pen in his heart."—*United Presbyterian.*