

THE BISHOP OF TORONTO ON CHURCH PRINCIPLES.

FROM HIS LORDSHIP'S RECENT CHARGE.

In regard to pre-composed forms of prayer, it is frequently objected that they are not so fit for devotional purposes as unpremeditated supplications, and that the first Christians mentioned in Scripture prayed extemporaneously. To this we reply, that forms of prayer were common among the Jews, that our Lord himself supplied his disciples with a form of prayer expressed in a plural number, and therefore intended for joint worship.

That forms of prayer were used in the primitive Church as far back as we have any accurate information, is manifest from ecclesiastical history. And this at least is sufficient to prove that forms of prayer are not unlawful, and that the members of our Church may with safe consciences conform to her rule on the subject. It may further be observed that in these days we have not the gifts of the spirit equal to those in the days of the apostles, and that it is rash and presumptuous for us to pour out our own unpremeditated thoughts, rather than to trust to a form carefully and wisely constructed by holy and wise men, in words which suit the general condition of worshippers. It is surely much safer and more reverential to depend on its accuracy, than to be exposed to the feelings, fancies, and infirmities of men, sometimes the most ignorant and inflated, who utter in their prayers such extravagantancies and follies as are shocking to all enlightened Christians, and highly offensive to the Saviour, whom they pretend to worship.

Let it also be remembered, that our Lord has given especial assurance of a gracious hearing to a joint prayer of those who shall agree together, touching something they shall ask in His name. Now it is impossible for uninspired men to agree together in a prayer offered up by one of them, if they know nothing of it beforehand, or have to learn what the prayer is, word by word as it is pronounced.

Let any one, with true devotion of heart, attend our Church for one Sunday, and follow the service with honest attention as it proceeds, and he will find it scriptural, spiritual, and practical. What part of the counsel of God, which has been revealed for the salvation of man, is not there to be found? Confession, prayer, intercession, the divinely instituted sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's supper. In truth, all that the most pious and best informed Christian can look for, whether in the way of his duty, or his occasional devotion, will be found in that treasure of religious services, the Common Prayer Book, arranged in the most beautiful order of succession, and expressed in such a solemn, devotional, lucid and harmonious style of composition, as can hardly be paralleled. The objection as to reading the prayers arises generally from ignorance or coldness; for a man may deliver a prayer, when the words are printed before him, as if they came from his own inspired imagination, or were the sole dictates of his own devotion.

The abuses of praying extemporaneously are so many, that I shall only notice one as a fair specimen. The parting command of our Lord to His people was that they should love one another; and there can be no more natural expression of their mutual love than intercession for each other at the throne of their common Father. Intercessory prayer, therefore, forms a common part of the public devotions of the Church. Yet, when an indiscreet man arises publicly to ask God to forgive other people's sins, there is great danger lest his prayer degenerate into oblique invective to confuse or annoy those who differ from him in opinion, or sink into the Pharisee's prayer: God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men. Surely, then, we are justified in preferring written forms to extemporaneous prayer, and indeed, written forms have been and will often be found to be essential to the continuance of the true faith.

The principles of Calvin, once thought so precious in Geneva, were replaced by Socinianism; the same thing happened with some of the Irish and English and American Presbyterians and Congregationalists, after they had unfortunately dispensed with written forms of prayer. Now it is evident that no such results could have happened, had such written forms been retained. A minister of our Church cannot keep back the leading doctrines of the Gospel. He may indeed leave them out in his sermons, dropping them one by one. But they still remain in the prayers, and his unfaithfulness may be cured by the truthfulness and energy of a conscientious successor.

With respect to the revision of the Prayer Book, which has for some time past agitated the mother Church, in which we are so deeply interested as our brethren in England, I rejoice to inform you that the question has been fully debated and decided against its promoters. If they had merely asked for the change of obsolete words and expressions, if any such there be, and a simplification of some of the Rubrics, which seem to conflict, or some improved arrangement of the services, they might have received some countenance. But this was not their object, they aimed at the most important doctrinal changes, attempting, for instance, by an unscriptural and delusive theory to reduce the doctrine of Holy Baptism to an empty form. Thus placing our Church in the dilemma of having no doctrine at all respecting Holy Baptism, &c. The members of our Church generally, both lay and clerical, feel that possessing such a treasure of truth as we have in the Book of Common Prayer, and which amidst our minor differences, presents such a bond of union, and also knowing what lively affection is felt by rich and poor, young and old, learned and unlearned, for that inalienable inheritance which we have received from our forefathers in the faith, we should, in attempting to improve it, be running the most fearful risk, altogether disproportionate to any advantage that can possibly be obtained.

Let us, then, my brethren, cleave to the Book of Common Prayer, and steadfastly refuse to favour any proposals for change in the silly hope that we may remove some trifling inconveniences, and still preserve for it all our reverence and love. If we once begin to change where will we stop? I foresee an aggravation of difficulties arising as well as an increase of irritation, and eventually the disruption of the Church of England. The debate was conducted with much courtesy and candour, although it presented only a small section of the Church contending for changes, which, if adopted, would in a short time have accomplished her total destruction. And it gives a noble specimen of the forbearing dignity of the House of Lords, that a measure involving objects of such inestimable value to millions should be discussed with good temper and calm moderation. When the agitation for the revision of the Prayer Book first commenced, it seemed to

be a desire of its friends to limit themselves to a mere abridgement of the length of the service and avoidance of repetitions; but when its noble mover brought up the petition in the House of Lords for consideration, it appeared that he would be content with nothing less than an undefined doctrinal alteration of all our formularies. Is it, then, to be wondered at, that not a single member of the episcopal bench supported the motion, and that the non-concurrence of the Clergy was proved by the fact that ten thousand had signed a Declaration against it? The Archbishop of Canterbury, with that mildness for which he has always been conspicuous, opposed the motion in behalf of the Right Reverend Bench. His Grace said, that admitting the possibility of minor alterations, which might be improvements, still what some thought blemishes others thought beauties, and it was not worth while to subject their admirable Liturgy to the discussions and controversies, not to say dissensions, which the the passage of any change must necessarily give rise to. Without noticing any other speeches it must be sufficient to remark that they were all in opposition to the proceeding, and the motion was negatived without a division.

It was justly observed as a grave objection, that there was no such thing as a convocation representing the United Church of England and Ireland, and therefore that changes introduced by any minor authority would not be binding. It is, however, pleasing to remark that some steps have already been taken towards the establishment of such a tribunal, and although the progress to its final establishment may be slow, yet from what has been done by the present convocation, under its weakness and deficiencies it has exhibited something of life and vitality; and with proper alterations and judicious modifications of its ancient constitution, so as to meet the improved knowledge and civilization of the present times, it might without difficulty be placed in working order. The assembly of such a convocation, representing the United Church of England and Ireland would offer a splendid spectacle, and if occasional access, in the way of deputation, from our Colonies and the Church of the United States, were encouraged, it would present the most august Church Legislature that the Christian world has ever yet beheld; and although much will require to be done, before this sublime convocation can be brought to bear yet there are no insurmountable obstacles in the way.

Having, my brethren, detained you, I fear, much too long, I have now to thank you for your patient forbearance and attention. Be assured, the more loyal we are to our Church, and the more our spiritual being is fashioned by her rules and teaching, the more fervent and true will be our love to God; and as it is our duty to fix in the souls of those we teach reverence for all law and order, so let us endeavor to keep our own ministrations up to its requirements.

Above all things, never falter in your faith. If your labours of love seem at times fruitless, be not cast down; for it is your office to spend and be spent in your Master's service; the result is with Him, and not with you, and He Himself tells us, that many be called but few chosen.

And now I bid you God speed, and bless you in the name of the Lord. I trust that I have never knowingly failed to appreciate your labours in profession, or your constant kindness and sympathy towards myself; nor in my intercourse with you have I omitted the expression of those cordial and grateful feelings of my heart towards you by which I have been animated.

Of myself, I can only say, that my great object has ever been to discharge the duties of my office quietly and impartially. I have never desired to clog or impede your exertions, but to second and sustain them, so far as my abilities and opportunities would permit. Having, myself, deep rooted convictions about what is the true teaching of the Church, I may not at all times have enjoyed the unassuming confidence of every one of my Clergy, but I can truly say that I have deserved it; whilst I have on all occasions been anxious to give a liberal construction to slight divergencies from what I believe to be the path in which the Church would guide her clergy, and to guard against making them wider through my own personal faults of disposition.

I have always been aware, that the best education I could make to promote unity in the Church, was to seek after inward unity and peace in my own breast, because it is only by cherishing such graces that I can give consistency to my religious character, and cause its influence to pervade and penetrate the Diocese, and shed abroad in it the power of faith and charity.

"Lastly, it is often urged that churches will do little good without faithful men to minister in them. This is most true; but as good parochial arrangements are at best powerless instruments without the right men, the best men must be powerless without proper parochial arrangements. The difficulty of finding an adequate supply of fit men, whose hearts are touched and guided by the Holy Spirit of God, can be no reason for our hesitating to contribute out of our abundance, to strengthen their hands when they are found, or prepare the way for their ministration. It only reminds us that we ought to add to our charity our hearty prayers, that, while we are using all secondary means, God will be graciously pleased to supply the primary means, and Himself prepare and send forth fit labourers to give life and spiritual energy to the outward machinery, by which we seek to advance His kingdom."—Bishop of London's recent Letter to the Laity of his diocese.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

We received, some time ago, a letter from the Rev. Dr. O'Meara in reference to a paragraph about the withdrawal of the grant from the Indian Missions. The paragraph was based on a statement in a Government Report which has since passed out of our hands. We hope before long to recur to the subject.

The obliging communication of "E. D." has been very carefully considered.

The letter of "J. C." will appear as soon as we have sufficient space.