

PRAYER BOOK INSTRUCTION.

BY THE REV. JOHN MAY, M. A.

IN these days when sermonizing is well-nigh jaded out, and the ambitious little Beechers, thirsting for applause, have made the pulpit a sort of flying trapeze, whilst the lazy have made it a species of sleepy hollow; would it be amiss to suggest to both the drones and the cranks the wholesomeness of a little modest earnest work in the form of Prayer book Instruction? I do not expect either the pulpit-"effort"-man, or the pulpit-drone, to relish the proposition; yet it does seem necessary to offer it. For, is not the general absence of systematic persistent instruction regarding the Book of Common Prayer a notorious fact, and a damaging fact at that? And, if so, are not the laity defrauded of a precious right, and the Church weakened very near a vital organ?

This Book is a *thesaurus* of precious stones, most of them seen dimly or not at all, by the average laic eye. In a very practical sense it is to him largely a sealed Book. In spite of the occasional grandiloquent eulogiums of the liturgy to which he is treated, he finds it somewhat dreary, and rather dry. "His own fault!" you retort. Well, if men were faultless they wouldn't need the Book at all.

No eulogium of the liturgy can, will, go too far; but it is not thus that enthusiastic Churchmen are made. Would a youth become a geometrician by a mere surface perusal of Euclid, with all the stilted enconiums of Plane Geometry in the world added on? For one, I am not a little suspicious of these plaudits of both the Church and her ritual. Have they not tended to make us rest on our oars? to make us content with the *possession* of a treasure rather than with its diligent intelligent use? to blind our eyes to the fact that the purest forms are dead and voiceless till unfilled with the breathing soul of the worshipper? When form is absent its place is usually filled by a crude and famine-pinched jejunity; when present, it is dead until infused with both "the Spirit and the *understanding*." How is the laymen to "pray with the understanding," if ignorance is present instead? A man may have the soul of a Rembrandt; but without a thorough knowledge of the means to be used, his picture will prove a daub.

Despite your eulogiums of the Prayer Book, the multitude remain stolidly apathetic. Then, when the blaze of the popular off-hand worship breathes on them, they melt away from the Church, and turn and rend her. Not the fault of the genius of the Church as we see that crystallized in her priceless forms; but the fault of her living exponents. Can you blame a man, shivering with cold, for rushing to the nearest blaze, even should it ultimately singe his beard? We are apt to forget that emotion rather than reason sways the hearts and determines the steps of most men. All the inexorable logic in the world will not keep such in the fold, if the fodder be dry and the air cold, when a fire is burning out yonder. Tons of energy have been "dissipated" in exposing the insane wildness and the unregulated heat

of certain forms of religion; still, cold hands will court the warmth. And, blink it as you will, to the mass of uninstructed people, our service, (if you leave out the music and the sermon), is anything but soul-warming. Why? Mainly, I think, because the "damper" of ignorance shuts off the current that should rouse the slumbering embers to a white heat. With a few exceptions in each congregation, very low seem the altar fires to burn; and that precious Book—our companion from birth to burial,—framed and furnished for soul-elocution, and fire, and life,—passes with us up the narrow way in silence; or speaking in a tongue but partially known.

I believe it is generally conceded that the liturgies of no age or country have excelled that of the Church of England; and yet England has been the very hot-bed of dissent! Now, I do not think it possible—to me it is a thing "unthinkable"—that any sane man, thoroughly instructed in the Prayer Book, could be wrenched by force from his Spiritual Mother, much less forsake her of free choice. I fear that the seceders "went out, not knowing whither they went," because *not knowing what they were leaving behind*. Did you ever meet a pervert from the Church (at least among the laity), who was not grossly ignorant of the Church and its constitution,—the Prayer Book, its genesis, growth, history, *rationale*, and doctrine? If schism be a sin, as well as the outcome of ignorance, which is most to blame—the straying sheep or the unfaithful shepherd? Let us look less to the fence, and more to the pasture.

Probably from no fold have more sheep strayed than from our own. How are we to account for a fact so sad? Not by the meagreness of her provisions. She is a storehouse crammed with the best food, both spiritual and intellectual. Larder and cellar are full; how about the table? That's where the hungry like to see the dishes set out smoking hot. Not better food, but better *cooking*, tempts men away. Let the fires blaze; bring forth the viands; and people will soon see the difference between beefsteak and pies. To the uncultured ear, the strains of a violin are more soul-stirring than the full tide of symphony rolling from a thousand instruments of music. Even so, the sect that harps on one or two strings of doctrine stands a fair chance of charming away the churchmen whose ears are shut to the Divine Orchestra of the Church whose yearly round of doctrine embraces the whole analogy or the faith. And why is he thus deaf to the glorious music? Because his ears have not been opened by systematic long-continued instruction in all the Prayer Book contains. Let it not be forgotten, the very massiveness, the width, the depth, the universality of the Church's system, all tend rather to repel than to attract untutored minds and superficial natures. Spiritually and intellectually, children, at least in religious affairs, they naturally run after sugar plums and tarts. There is *one* way to create and develop a normal appetite for plain, solid, wholesome diet; and that way is—life-long Prayer Book instruction. The

clergyman in whose eye this book is marvellous in glories beyond all others save one, now and then sees some member of his flock fling it aside with its perfect round of truth, its offices so touchingly fitted to all sorts and conditions of men, and all aspects of this mortal life, its myriad voices of devotion which, from all the ages, have gone up to the ear of God as the sound of many waters—fling it aside for the crudities and the leanness of extemporaneous worship; and—he marvels! No occasion to marvel. All quite natural, and to be expected. These poor wanderers care not for the Church, for they prize not her noble liturgy. How should they? To them its matchless beauty has not been opened.

CONCERNING PRIESTS' WIVES.

COMMUNICATED.

THE Bishop of Liverpool, the Right Rev. J. C. Ryle, in a recent address to some theological students, insisted strongly on the care they should exercise over their habits. He exhorted all who were not engaged to take heed what they were about. "Think," he said, "was the advice once given; think; and again a third time, think. The words of the Marriage Service are wise and true, which remind us that Holy Matrimony is not a state to be entered into wantonly and unadvisedly. Take the experience of an old man. I see young ministers going into parishes united to worldly, ungodly, though it may be affectionate wives. Do beware of this, and pray that you may not make a mistake here."

As the Bishop of Liverpool has been married three times, it is to be presumed he speaks from the experience derived from a threefold and thrice-repeated act of thought. His words may well be laid to heart. An unsuitable or worldly wife, however estimable in other respects, will, as a rule, mar a priest's usefulness wherever he may be stationed, and do nearly as much to injure the Church as a cleric who has mistaken his vocation, and taken on his shoulders the yoke of the priesthood without being "called as was Aaron."

This is particularly the case in the United States and Canada, where the Church, being unendowed, depends for her very existence mainly upon the example set by her clergy, and the influence they exert upon their parishioners. Indeed, it is not going too far to assert that the Church's ministers are bound by their Ordination engagements to see that they select as their wives only such women as are likely to give edification; to bring up their children in the fear of God, and to further the good of the Church by all means in their power. If this is not so, why does the Bishop demand of every candidate for the diaconate and priesthood, whether he will be "diligent to frame and fashion his own self and his family according to the doctrine of Christ?" and to make both himself and his family, as much as in him lies, "wholesome examples and patterns to the flock of Christ?" So far have some English, and at least two American Bishops carried this principle, as to have occasionally refused ordi-