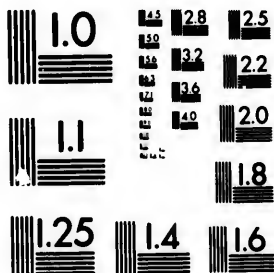


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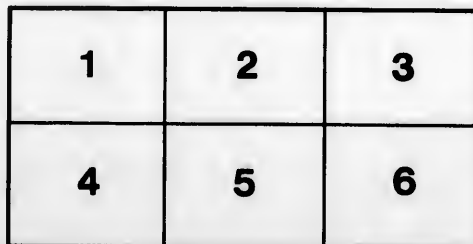
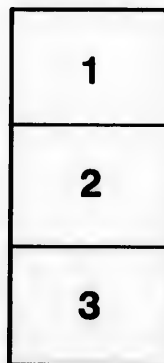
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THE EAST IN PRAYER.

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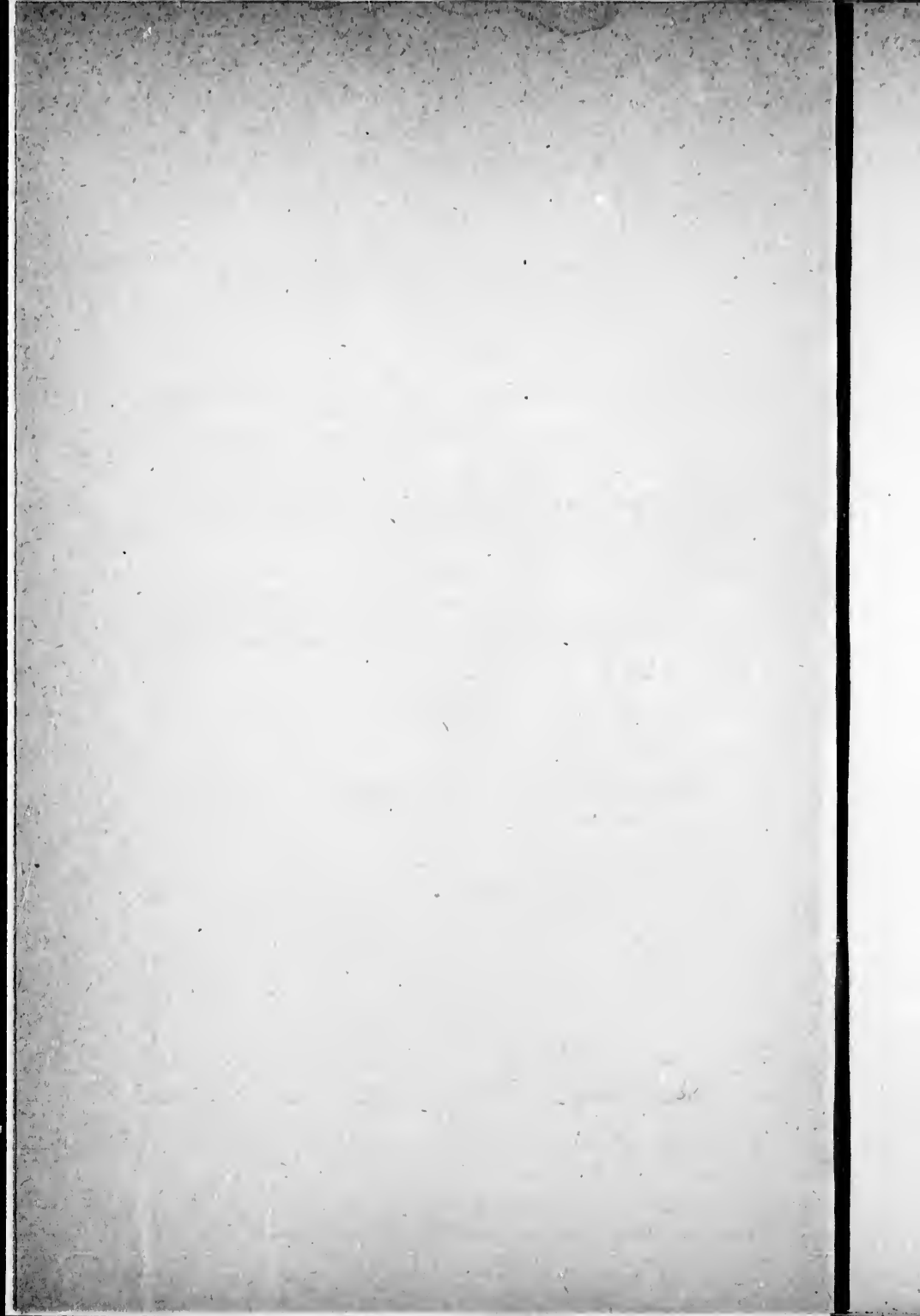
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THE EAST IN PRAYER.



THE EAST IN PRAYER.

In view of the striking contrast between the types and shadows, and all the minute ceremonial observances of the Jewish Church, and the purely spiritual worship of the Christian Church, it can hardly fail to attract the notice of a thoughtful observer, when in some of our modern churches, the worshippers are seen studiously aiming at praying towards the east, or suddenly wheeling in the same direction in pronouncing the Creed.

That the Hebrew worshipper should turn towards the temple on which the visible presence of God was manifested between the cherubim, was a reasonable and intelligent act of worship. To the Romanist who literally believes that by the miracle of the Mass, the wafer has been converted into the Divine Being there present on the altar, the turning of the devout worshipper toward that visible presence, is also, from his point of view, a reasonable, if not an intelligent act of worship. But what has the Protestant worshipper, who believes that the "sacramental bread and wine remain still in their very natural substances ; and

the natural body and blood of our Saviour Christ are in heaven, and not here,"—what has he to do with turning to the so-called "altar," or looking anywhere but up to heaven, where alone the hearer and answerer of prayer dwells?

Nevertheless as the practice of turning to the East in the public worship of the Christian Church, is more and more advocated and insisted on, by one influential class of ecclesiastical reformers, it is worth while inquiring into the history and authority for the practice.

It is said that turning to the East in their solemn adorations, was a ceremony of almost general use and practice in the ancient church, and sundry reasons are given for it by the Fathers, one of which is: "That the East, as the seat of light and brightness, was the most honourable part of creation, and therefore peculiarly ascribed to God, the fountain of light, and the illuminator of all things; as the West was ascribed to the devil, because he hides the light and brings darkness on men to their destruction."—(*Vide* Hook's Church Dictionary.)

To what Father are we indebted for this piece of information respecting the devil's place of residence? It must have been one who lived in the dark ages, and there were many such, for the last of the so-called "Fathers" died in the twelfth century. For my part

I do not see the necessity of venerating the opinions of every one whom the Church of Rome has dubbed with that name.

But in soberness let me ask when was this custom introduced into the Christian Church, and by whom, and upon what authority, and if it was a very ancient custom how does it happen that some of the old Basilicas in Rome do not have their apses at the East ?

In fact, according to Paulinus of Nola, the early churches usually *fronted* the East.

Speaking of the rites and usages in the fourth century, Canon Robertson* says: "Pagan usages were adopted,—the burning of lamps or candles by day (which, even so lately as the time of Lactantius, had been a subject of ridicule for the Christian controversialists), incense, lustrations, and the like. . . . A merely external performance of duties, as it was all that heathenism required, came to be regarded by many as sufficient in Christianity also The ritual of the church was viewed as a theatrical exhibition, Usages which had grown up insensibly were now fixed by express regulations ;

* History of the Christian Church. By James C. Robertson, M.A., Canon of Canterbury, and Prof. of Eccles. Hist. in King's College. London, 1867.

and by this and the other means which have been mentioned, the ritual system was so overlaid with rules and ceremonies, as to give occasion for St. Augustine's celebrated complaint, "that they were grown to such a number that the estate of Christian people was in a worse case concerning that matter than were the Jews."

Here perhaps we see the introduction into the Christian Church of turning to the East—a pagan custom—which grew up insensibly.

Had there been any testimony in favour of worshipping to the East in the Apostolic age, Dean Hook would probably have discovered it, although he seems to have overlooked the mention thereof at the end of the second century by Clemens of Alexandria and Tertullian. There were heresies then, however, and even Tertullian himself lapsed into Montanism.

All that the Dean says is, that "Epiphanius speaking of the madness of the imposter Elxæus,* counts this as one instance of it among other things, that he forbade praying toward the East."

* Mosheim does not brand Elxæi as an imposter, but calls him a Gnostic.

This St. Epiphanius was a Christian Bishop, of the fourth century (died A.D. 403), who engaged in all the controversies of the times. It is said that his judgment was rash, and his credulity and mistakes very abundant. Another writer says that he was an austere and superstitious ascetic, and as a bitter controversialist, he often resorts to untrue arguments for the refutation of heretics. Scaliger uses still stronger language, for he calls St. Epiphanius an ignorant man, who committed the greatest blunders, told the greatest falsehoods, and knew next to nothing about either Hebrew or Greek!

What value, if any, is to be placed upon the opinion of such a Father? Should it be retorted that Epiphanius must have been a man of learning, as he was acquainted with five languages, I have only to say that such knowledge is not at all uncommon in the Levant, where I have had Greek servants who could speak even more languages, and they, certainly, were no scholars.

I believe that God's chosen people, and they only, had a valid reason for turning to a particular quarter when praying; and wherever they were, the Jews turned towards the Temple, because the *Shechinah*, or Divine Presence rested over the Mercy Seat, and was visibly seen in the semblance of a cloud over it.

Praying to the East, is an old pagan custom, mentioned by Victorius, in his rules for building heathen temples, the Eastern half of the sky being considered propitious, and the other half unlucky,—but I have never been able to find a sufficient warrant for its use by Christians. On the contrary, it appears to be expressly condemned in Scripture.

Listen to the prophet Ezekiel, (viii. 16,)—"And he brought me into the inner court of the Lord's house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about five-and-twenty men, with their backs towards the temple of the Lord, *and their faces towards the East*; and they worshipped the sun *towards the East*. Then said he unto me, Hast thou seen this, O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here?"

Ritualists, when travelling, except they carry pocket compasses, must be as uncomfortably situated as Mahomedans, who also direct their prayers to a particular spot; and on board ship in my younger days I was often struck by seeing Musslemen who felt inclined to pray, go to the man at the wheel, and by signs and sometimes in addition the word "Mecca," ask the rude (and to them *infidel*) sailor to what quarter they should direct their prayers, when they

would coolly spread out their prayer carpet or bur-noos on the deck to kneel on, and commence their devotions.

I often wondered that they trusted so much to the despised *giaour*, who might, if he chose have ruined the effect of their prayers, by directing them to the wrong point of the compass !

If during a sea-voyage a Ritualist should commence his prayers properly by consulting the ship's compass before descending to the cabin to his devotions, and while saying his Creed the ship should go on another tack without his being aware of it, would not (according to his ideas) the latter part of his prayers be addressed to the devil in the West ?

Did Moses pray to the East ? No—for his words are, "The Lord he is God in heaven above, and in the earth beneath." And David ? No—for he sang, "If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there ; if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there." And Solomon ? No—for he prayed, "Then hear thou from heaven thy dwelling place."

Nevertheless, ceremonial observances, and a special sanctity to the Temple of Jerusalem, constituted a feature of the Hebrew worship to which our Lord lent His full countenance. He purified the Temple that it

might be restored to its true use as a house of prayer ; even when foretelling its speedy and final overthrow. But in His answer to the woman of Samaria, we seem to read the unanswerable judgment of the Divine Founder of the Christian Church on all substitution of forms, and all addition of needless ceremonies for the pure spiritual worship which was thenceforth to displace the temple service, and the praying towards Jerusalem. "Our fathers," said the woman, "worshipped in this mountain ; and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem worship the Father. . . . The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth."

"Hear thou from heaven thy dwelling place," was the prayer of Solomon, even when dedicating that one visible temple in which God was pleased to manifest His visible presence on earth ; and He of whom all the types and sacrifices of the Old Testament church were but as shadows, who Himself, when on earth, spent whole nights in prayer, did not, while condescending to teach His disciples how to pray, admonish them to turn to the East or elsewhere.

Of the poor publican whose humility He commended, He says he did "not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven," the seat of Him to whom prayer alone is to be offered; and so He taught His disciples, "Our Father, which art in heaven," and to that OMNIPRESENT GOD alone (blessed be His holy name), we should only address our prayers.

A TRUE CATHOLIC.



O God, fill my heart with fear of Thee; not with the fear of torment, but with the holy, child-like fear of offending so kind a Father, so gracious and merciful a Saviour.

