

## Our Public Worship.

WE may differ in opinion as to whether there are definite signs of a revival of religion amongst us to-day; but we should all agree that a rallying to the worship of God in the assemblies of His people would be the best proof that a real spiritual revival was at hand. Of that there is no great sign as yet. "The sympathetic conditions" says Dr. Cadman, "which a religious revival presupposes, in which it originates, by which its results are conserved, are created by the breathings of God's saints". The Church must be a worshipping, before she becomes a witnessing, Church. The Promise is to the twos and threes, gathered together, and not to individuals who choose to follow their varying moods, and the inclinations and preferences of their own minds.

The worship of God is the highest function of the Christian Church. In worship the Fellowship of Believers reaches its noblest heights. Lord Haldane was wont to say, that in Education the "Eternities" matter most, life's unchanging background of undying realities. Worship counts most of all in the life and witness of the Church, since that life comes and flows from hidden sources which lie behind the shifting scene of human activities. As Churches we may be willing to strive in many directions for the Kingdom of God and His righteousness: the wheels of organization may run with regularity; endless experiments may be attempted: but, without the Worship of God, the river of the Church's life will become a mere trickling stream losing itself in the desert sands.

It has been truly said that Christian worship is an end in itself, much more a giving than a receiving. "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?" "Bring an offering" and come into the House of the Lord. The offering need be no more than the adoration of the contrite and worshipping heart. To "arrive" was enough: that the feet were standing within the gates of the sanctuary was gladness enough. The soul was "halted" on the threshold of the Divine glory and majesty, well lost in wonder and praise. The place itself was holy ground. Worship was what the spirit of man needed, his rightful attitude once he realized the setting of his mortal life, and was awake to the immensities of the "large place" wherein it pleased God he should dwell.

Worship, of course, has its far-reaching results, its fruits, its moral cleansing and correcting: its subduing and uplifting influence. Worship often fills a hungry soul with good things, and stirs the selfish life to a sense of gratitude. It leaves a man possessing nothing, and rich only towards God. He begins to see his nakedness, and that he is wretched, and poor, and blind. As I once heard an Anglican Bishop tell, with memorable alliterativeness, how the "pride of life" had been cast out of his egotistical personality:—the pride of place, the pride of grace, the pride of face, the pride of race. This river from the Throne of God has power to cleanse the life, as the tides of ocean cleanse the foul shores of the world. "Worship," says Dr. Burnet, "is God's great way of working His marvels of liberation and renewal. It will do what no amount of effort without it, however conscientious, could ever do. Our Deliverances come by being brought and kept face to face with the splendour of God, and His many-coloured grace."

These spiritual effects of worship should lead us to set great store by the assembling of ourselves together. The conduct of worship, its various portions and parts, is of the utmost importance. If worship be like poetry, "the problem of putting the Infinite into the finite", no particular order or mode of worship can meet our varied needs. Here, as often elsewhere, the letter may have a deadening effect, the spirit alone giving life. It is well to realize that the whole service, from beginning to end, should be worship. The Sermon is not to be considered a kind of climax, that for which we have come, and upon which the inspiration or otherwise of the Service depends. Like all else, the Sermon is also an offering: its chief end is to glorify God, though it be a man speaking to men. As ministers of the Word of God, we should oftener realize the joy of preaching, if the Sermon lay less heavily on heart and mind. The joy of the Lord would be our strength and even our song!

The complaint is sometimes made that our Free Church Services are lacking in a due Spirit of reverence. If so, this can only be the result of failure in our attitude and response to the opportunities of worship, not in any real degree to the absence of external appeal in our visible surroundings. Some no doubt feel that there are elements of richness and colour, what might be called "the high lights" of worship, never experienced in our more simple services. Some seek the more elaborate forms of worship, and are helped in their devotions by extraneous aids, and outward appeals to aesthetic taste. But we are apt to identify reverence with impressiveness, and

to confuse the emotions and the senses. The utmost simplicity and the deepest reverence may go hand in hand. There is no more spiritual effect in elaborate, than in simple, services. It is not the form of worship that matters supremely, but the spirit. "I seek divine simplicity in him who handles divine things." If reverence be lacking, it is lacking in the heart of the worshipper. "When they were awake, they saw His glory." We cannot err if we seek simplicity in even a greater degree; for simplicity and nobility are born friends. Our Lord's words are conclusive: "God is a spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him."

Worship calls for preparation of mind and heart on the part of those who would lead it. The minister's part is a paramount one, and his contribution to the spiritual atmosphere of the service is often of decisive influence. This rare and beautiful thing, this "breath" or spirit of worship, may not be taken for granted, because our people are in their places in the Sanctuary. We, who minister in holy things; take it with us. It is already a "presence" in our hearts: we have bought our costly perfume, and breaking the box, the odour of the ointment fills the room. The minister must assume the onus of this preparation, for the people to whom he ministers come, for the most part, with minds preoccupied, and after a rush of household duties which cannot be delayed or postponed. They must needs be captured for this hour of worship, as they *are*, and led to the quiet waters of contemplation and prayer. It is just this consciousness, on the part of the minister, of their frailties and needs that makes him a true guide and helper. There are the green pastures of the Masters of Devotion upon which we can nourish our souls by way of preparation; but perhaps, a sympathetic knowledge of our people's needs and circumstances is even more helpful, and a greater stimulus in enabling us to make articulate what they find it difficult either to think or utter. We are there not only speak *to* them, but even more, to speak *for* them.

And what of some of the other portions and parts of our weekly worship? Some ministers seek a certain unity in hymns and reading, while others aim at variety throughout the Service. We shall all agree that music can play a great and important part in worship; but music focussed in the Choir may have a separating and dividing influence in our worship. There may be an "Amen" corner. Choirs are not separate Guilds with special privileges, but a part of the praising fellowship, whose service is to lead us and help us in our praise, so that the

congregation may become its own Choir. "Let all the people praise Thee, O Lord."

In the reading of the Scriptures there is given us a rare opportunity, not, I think, sufficiently realized by many ministers. The Book of books would seem to possess a "Voice" of its own—like the sound of many waters rolling evermore. "My words they are spirit and life." Time is never misspent when we give careful preparation to the reading of the Word of God. It lies there on the pulpit desk, as the symbol of the Spirit's might, "living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword . . . quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart." We may say of it, as David said of Goliath's sword: "There is none like it: give it me." If we cannot bring a "hush" from its reading, there is something wrong with our reading!

Some ministers find that a brief period of silence is an aid to reverent worship.

"As in life's best hours we hear  
By the Spirit's finer ear  
His low voice within us. . . .  
His the primal language, His  
The eternal silences."

"There was silence and I heard a voice." But often, even short interludes of Silence seem to irk some congregations: and bring only a rather bewildering sense of vacancy. Most congregations, however, can be led to believe that in the silence there may be a "listening and in the space a power." There are times when the minister is aware of a lack of responsiveness on the part of the people. He is not "getting there," and a few seconds even of silent prayer and meditation may prove a blessed corrective of the vagrant mind, leading the whole congregation captive to the Throne of the Heavenly grace.

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper should mark the summit of our Christian Worship. But in many of our churches the Communion often seems a brief service, added on to what has gone before. There is the impression that with the pronouncement of the benediction prior to the Communion, what we really came for is now over! But the Communion is surely the *climax* of our adoration and worship. It would be well for our Churches to give the Communion of the Lord's Supper a new and heightened importance. We tend overmuch to rely on the attraction of the pulpit, and forget that heart-hunger, which is more widespread than we imagine, for fellowship with the Soul's Redeemer. In the silence of the

Holy Table men and women touch the living Lord more closely, more nearly and are made whole again. The late Dr. Parkes Cadman tells of how he and his people entered upon a fresh realization of the importance of the place of the Communion in worship. "In the restraint, yet also the freedom of our Protestant faith, we have endeavoured to make the bi-monthly Communion service the culmination of our devotion. It has become the most influential means of grace we enjoy, and its observance on Good Friday is the surpassing event of our organization as a part of the priesthood in the Body of which Christ is the Head."

ALLAN M. RITCHIE.

THOMAS HAMERSLEY in 1651/2 joined in a letter to Cromwell, published by Nickolls. He signed on behalf of a Baptist church at Berry Hill, which, by Professor Mawer of the Place-Name Society, is at last identified as a mile-and-a-half from Stone in Staffordshire. Though Thomas joined the Friends, his family remained Baptist. John signed the Brief Confession of 1660, and the Humble Representation of 1661 that he and his friends disapproved of Venner's Fifth-Monarchy insurrection. The church changed its name to Stone. One of its members, George White, went to London, and about 1689 became Elder of the 1624 church, then at Dockhead. The church was disturbed as to some new teaching in the south, asked explanations, and received only a shuffling answer which characterised the Assembly's policy for several years. So the Stone church ceased to correspond. Doctor John Hammersley emigrated to Albermarle Sound, on the Perquimans river at the north of Carolina, where he did good work till at least 1742. His friends resumed correspondence with the orthodox General Baptists in 1702, and secured a gift of books to the Carolina settlers, then the sending of Ingram from Southwark to be Elder at a new Stone or Stono and of Isaac Chanler from Covent Garden to the Ashley river. In 1739 Haywood was ordained and sent; in 1758 Daniel Wheeler; in 1772 Philip Dobel. But at the English Stone, even Samuel Acton failed to keep the church alive.

W.T.W.