

## ART. IV.—ARE PRAYERS FOR THE DEAD SUPERSTITIOUS?

SUPERSTITION has been defined to be excessive fear of God, or unreasonable or unwarrantable religious belief. Dr. Johnson says it is "the observance of unnecessary and uncommanded rites or practices." It is clear, therefore, that as men's opinions have changed, so, what has been deemed to amount to superstition has varied at different times and in different places. Under the Roman Empire the Christian religion was considered a pernicious superstition—*exitiosa superstitio*—while the pagan rites and ceremonies which prevailed all over the civilized world of that day were deemed pious and good. Again, when the change of religion took place in this country in the sixteenth century, much that had up to then been considered pure and undefiled religion became superstitious. The Reformation divines looked upon the Bible as the sole test. A doctrine or practice which had not its warrant of God's word was considered superstitious. The views of the Reformers were formulated in articles, homilies, and books of prayer, and were in that form adopted and enforced by the State as being the true religion. The supremacy of the Bible, which may be called the fundamental rule of Protestantism, was embodied in Article VI., which is as follows: "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation, so that whatsoever is not read therein nor may be proved thereby is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation." Thus, for example, Archbishop Sandys says: "Shall we teach purgatory and prayer to the dead or for the dead? To be short, shall we teach the *doctrine of men*?" I do not, however, propose now to consider the question from the theological standpoint so much as from the legal point of view. What was pious and what was not, from the time of the Reformation was regulated by the law of the land, and until the Toleration Acts came into operation the rites of a religion not sanctioned by law were superstitious, and the use of property for the propagation of the rites of any such religion was termed a superstitious use. Thus, before the days of toleration a gift to maintain the doctrines of the Church of Scotland in England would be superstitious, and in like manner a gift to maintain and educate ministers to be sent into Scotland to propagate the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England there was held to be superstitious, and this although both Churches were Protestant and differed only on minor

points. A gift for religious purposes has, therefore, always been very closely scrutinized, for if the use be superstitious the gift goes either to the Crown, the next of kin, the heir at law, or to charitable purposes of a like character, according to circumstances. Also the monarch is by the common law obliged, and for that purpose entrusted and empowered, to see that nothing be done to the disherison of the Crown or the propagation of a false religion, and to that end is entitled to pray a discovery of a trust to a superstitious use (1 Salk. 162). It was a very serious question "what they in those times thought to be the service of God." It is not surprising, therefore, that there have been since the Reformation a very large number of cases decided at law as to the validity of such gifts, and among them none are more frequent than gifts for prayers for the souls of the departed. These, in spite of the toleration extended to Roman Catholics by legislation of the present century, are still held to be superstitious in England, though not in Ireland.

The cases principally arose on the construction of the Act 1 Edward VI., c. 14, the fifth section of which gave to the King all lands devoted to the founding or maintenance of any anniversary, or obit, or other like thing, intent, or purpose; and by many decisions it was decided that praying for souls was a like intent and purpose as an anniversary or obit within the meaning of the Act, although not to be performed by a priest or in any chapel (*per* Cottenham, L. C. 5, *M. and C.* 11). This construction would not (in accordance with the principle I have laid down) have been put upon the Act at the date of its passing, as then prayers for the dead were not only lawful in the Church, but enjoined, nor while the first Prayer-Book of Edward VI. was in force—*i.e.*, up to 1552 A.D. But in that year the second Prayer-Book of Edward was issued under statutory authority, and from it the formal prayers for the departed were completely expunged, and also all passages which might be supposed to countenance such prayers—at least, so the Reformers thought; and to establish this position, I will go through a few of the more prominent authorities, and give passages from the works of contemporary writers, for, in order to show what was done at the Reformation, it is necessary to go to the works of those who lived at the time and took an actual part in the momentous events which then occurred. It is of no use to cite the views of Laud and the Caroline divines who lived a hundred years afterwards. Some of the latter, it is true, advocated prayers for the dead, but in so doing they were advocating dissenting opinions—they were contravening the opinion received in the Church and laid down by law; and one of the most celebrated of them, Bishop

Cosin, gives this very halting testimony—that such prayers ought to be used, although “it cannot be exactly and distinctly declared what benefit the dead receive by these prayers which the living make for them” (“Works,” v. 375). But the Reformers are unanimous in their testimony, and their views are perhaps nowhere better stated than by Bishop Miles Coverdale in “An Exhortation to the carrying of Christ’s Cross” (1554) as follows: “Throughout the canonical books of the Old and New Testament we find neither precept nor ensample of praying for any when they be departed this life, but as men die so shall they arise.” “We may well see, if we will, that as prayer for the dead is not available or profitable to the dead, so is it of us not allowable or to be exercised. For as they that are departed are past our prayers, being either in joy or in misery, as is above showed, even so we, having for it no word of God, whereupon faith leaneth, cannot but sin in doing it, in that we do it not of faith because we have no word of God for it.” These passages have been attributed by some to the martyr Bradford, but the views of the Reformers are generally expressed in similar terms.

Archbishop Cranmer as early as 1549 says: “The Scripture maketh mention of two places where the dead be received after this life, of heaven and hell, but of purgatory is not one word spoken.” “They that be dead be past the time of repentance.” “God hath promised by his word that the souls of the just be in God’s hand, and no pain shall touch them” (“Answer to the Fifteen Articles of the Devon Rebels”). Bishop Latimer also, in his sermon on the Day of Judgment, which was preached on the Second Sunday in Advent, 1552, is very emphatic on the question: “I tell you,” he says, “that though His general coming be not yet, yet for all that He will come one day and take us out of this world, and no doubt as He finds us, so we shall have; if He find us ready and in a state of salvation, no doubt we shall be saved for ever, world without end. Again, if He find us in the state of damnation, we shall be damned, world without end. There is no remedy after we are once past this world; no penance will help then, nor anything that man is able to do for us.”

The views of the divines who were in authority during the early years of the reign of Queen Elizabeth are just as clear. Thus, Bishop Jewel, the celebrated author of the “Apology,” says plainly that prayer for the dead is “mere superstitious and utterly without warrant of God’s Word” (“Works,” ii. 743). Also Dr. Guest, afterwards Bishop of Rochester, a very learned man, and accounted one of the highest Churchmen of the time among the Reformers, was (in 1559) one of the persons

appointed to revise the old Prayer-Book and prepare a new one. One of the questions debated was: "Whether it be not convenient to continue the use of praying for the dead in the Communion" (Strype, "Annals," i. 121). Guest's remarks upon this, addressed to Sir Wm. Cecil, are as follows: "That praying for the dead is not now used in the Communion, because it doth seem to make for the sacrifice of the dead. And also because, as it was used in the first book, it makes some of the faithful to be in heaven and to need no mercy; and some of them to be in another place and to lack help and mercy. As though they were not all alike redeemed and brought to heaven by Christ's merits; but some deserved it, as it is said of martyrs; and some, for lack of such perfectness, were in purgatory, as it is spoken of the meaner sort. But thus to pray for the dead in the Communion was not used in Christ and his Apostles' time nor in Justin's time, who, speaking of the manner of using the Communion, reporteth not this" (Strype, "Annals," ii. 462).

In July, 1559, Henry II., the King of France, died, and, according to the custom of the times, his obsequies were solemnly observed in St. Paul's Cathedral on September 8 and 9, the funeral pomp beginning on the eve of one day and finishing on the morning of the day following. A full account is given of the ceremonies in Strype ("Annals," i. 187 *et seq.*), and is especially interesting at the present time, as these solemnities have been adduced as a precedent for a requiem Mass recently held for her late Majesty Queen Victoria, whereas the records show that prayers for the dead were not allowed even on such a State occasion, and at such a transition period as this. It is recorded that the funeral ceremonies were not such as were then lately used under popery, the grosser superstitions being omitted. Thus on Friday, September 8, when the hearse was solemnly brought into the church, and every man placed, whereas the ancient custom was for one of the heralds to bid aloud the prayer for the soul of the party departed, saying, "Pray for the soul of," etc., now there was an alteration in the words, for York herald, standing at the upper choir door, bade the prayer (as it used to be called, but now more properly the praise), first in English and after in French, "Benoist soit eternal," etc., "Blessed be the King of eternal glory, who through His Divine mercy hath translated the most high puissant and victorious Prince, Henry II., late the French King, from this earthly to His heavenly kingdom," which words he used again at the end of *Benedictus* and at the end of the service, and again on the morrow at the times accustomed. Certain psalms of praise were sung for the departure of the dead in

the faith of Christ. The Bishop-elect of Hereford (Dr. Scory) preached. His sermon is not extant, but seeing that he preached instead of Dr. Grindal (who was ill), and in the presence of the Archbishop of Canterbury and all the magnates of the realm, it may be assumed that the doctrines enunciated in it were similar to those contained in Bishop Grindal's sermon on the similar occasion of the death of the Emperor Ferdinand in 1564, reference to which will be made later on; but Strype records that Bishop Scory pointed out how the service "was to give praise to God for taking away their brother in the faith of Christ." This account shows the view held at the very beginning of Elizabeth's reign, and that prayers for the dead were eliminated from the memorial service for a Roman Catholic potentate. In this transition period and at a State ceremonial it would not have been surprising if they had been retained for the nonce. But by the year 1564 the question seems to have been placed beyond all doubt. In that year the Emperor Ferdinand died, and a funeral solemnity of a similar character to that already described was held in St. Paul's on October 3. Dr. Grindal, then Bishop of London, preached a long and eloquent sermon on the occasion, wherein he remarked that whatever the religion of the Emperor was, "this solemn action for memorial of him may very well be used notwithstanding," but he said there would no doubt be two contrary judgments as to the same. "The one part will say there is too little done, the other will say there is too much. The first part (*i.e.*, the Papists) will allege that although they cannot but confess the action to be done very honourably and with much magnificency, yet the principal matter of all is wanting (will they say): for here is an honourable memorial of the Emperor Ferdinandus, but here is (say they) no prayer for the soul of Ferdinandus. To those I answer that the Holy Scriptures, the word of God, is the candle and the lantern for our steps. By it we ought to direct our steps if we will please God; without it we walk in darkness, and know not whither we go. But first of all in the Scriptures we find no commandment to pray for the souls departed, unless they will cite the place of the Book of Machabees." The learned Bishop then proceeds to state that the Books of Maccabees are not canonical, and that the well-known passage, "It is a holy and a wholesome thought to pray for the dead," "is suspected to have been corrupted of purpose by some addition put to many years after. For most certain it is if prayer for the dead had been so necessary as many nowadays would have it seem, it had not lacked all authority and example of the canonical Scriptures, as it doth." Bishop Grindal then proceeds to deal

with the writings of the Fathers, and says that although in some of them "there is mention of praying for the dead, yet it is in a far other meaning with them than the schoolmen and other of the latter time, being men ignorant in the tongues and other good learnings, have collected and gathered of them. For it is manifest that those holy Fathers meant nothing less than by praying for those that were departed to establish purgatory or third place, without the which neither the Pope himself nor any of his clergy would anything at all contend for praying for the dead. For the terror of purgatory being taken away, their gain would cease, and withal their prayer for the dead, invented for filthy lucre, were at an end. For it is confessed of all men that if there be no third place, prayer for the dead is in vain, for those that be in heaven need it not, those that be in hell cannot be holpen by it, so that it needeth not or booteth not, as the old proverb goeth. If the ancient Fathers, therefore, when they pray for the dead, mean of the dead which are already in heaven, and not elsewhere, then must we need by their prayer understand either thanksgiving, or else take such petitions for the dead (as they be indeed in some places) for figures of eloquence or exornation of their style and oration rather than necessary grounds of reason of any doctrine" (Archbishop Grindal's "Remains," pp. 23-25). Dr. Grindal, as Archbishop, first of York and afterwards of Canterbury, issued various injunctions on the subject, of which the following is one: The churchwardens shall see "that no month minds or yearly commemorations of the dead, nor any other superstitious ceremonies, be observed or used which tend either to the maintenance of prayer for the dead or of the Popish purgatory" ("Remains," p. 136).

Such passages from contemporary Bishops, whose duty it was to understand and administer the law, could easily be multiplied, but suffice it to quote the following from Whitgift, the last of the Elizabethan Archbishops. Writing towards the end of the reign of Elizabeth, he says: "I do not think any to be so simple that, hearing the manner and form of burying our dead, can or will imagine that we pray for the dead" ("Works," p. 366). And, again: "It is a manifest untruth to maintain that we pray for the dead."

This overwhelming body of opinion is in accord with the legal formularies of the Church. Thus the Twenty-second Article of Religion declared the Romish doctrine concerning purgatory to be a fond thing vainly invented and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the word of God; and the Anglican doctrine is expounded in more detail in the official exposition of Church teaching—the Homilies—in which we are exhorted not to "dream any more

that the souls of the dead are anything at all holpen by our prayers, but as the Scripture teacheth us let us think that the soul of man passing out of the body goeth straightways either to heaven or else to hell whereof the one needeth no prayer and the other is without redemption." "Let us not, therefore, dream either of purgatory or of prayer for the souls of them that be dead."

The courts of law therefrom, from the first Elizabeth down to the present day, have been of opinion that there had been a change of doctrine on this point, and that prayers for the dead had become illegal, and therefore superstitious at common law, and, further, that they were a "like intent and purpose" under the Act of 1 Edward VI. The attempts, therefore, of extremists—the ultra High Church on the one hand, and the ultra Protestants on the other—to torture out of certain isolated passages of the Prayer-Book a recognition of prayers for the dead have failed. They are sufficiently answered by the attitude taken up by the legal and ecclesiastical authorities during the reign of Elizabeth, and at no subsequent revision of the Prayer-Book has any alteration been made. Indeed, the insertion of prayers for the dead was actually proposed in 1662, considered, and finally rejected.

But although *public* prayer for the departed is clearly illegal, it has been argued that such prayers in *private* (if unconnected with the Romish doctrine of purgatory), though discouraged by the Church, are not actually forbidden, and are, therefore, not illegal. This view has the high authority of a former Dean of Arches, the late Sir Herbert Jenner-Fust, who gave a decision to this effect in the case of *Breeks v. Woolfrey*. His decision has great weight, for he himself (as the writer was informed by his son, the late Bishop Jenner) held personally a strong belief that prayers for the dead are useless and improper. The case in question was one in which a Roman Catholic widow erected a tombstone in a Church of England churchyard to her deceased husband, and placed on the stone an inscription containing the words, "Pray for the soul of ——" and the well-known text from the Apocrypha (already referred to): "It is a holy and a wholesome thought to pray for the dead." The judge declined to order the inscription to be removed, on the ground that there was nothing to show that the prayers were invited for a soul in purgatory, and that prayers for souls not in purgatory were not illegal in the Church of England, though discouraged by it. The following extract will show his method of dealing with the question: "Praying for the dead is a practice of much earlier date than the introduction of the doctrine of purgatory. The prayers by primitive Christians for the

souls of the departed were offered with a different intention from those who profess the Roman religion. The object of such prayers with the latter was to relieve the souls of the departed from the pains of purgatory. That of the former was that the souls might have rest and quiet in the interval between death and the resurrection, and that at the Last Day they might receive the perfect consummation of bliss; but certainly such prayers had no reference to a state of suffering in which the souls were supposed to be during the intermediate time." This judgment, therefore, contradicts the Reformers, who (as we have seen) said that prayer for the dead among the early Christians meant praise for the dead. It also draws a very subtle distinction between degrees of pain. It imagines that in the interval between death and the resurrection the souls of the faithful departed may be in what the learned Collier calls "a state of imperfect bliss"—*i.e.*, in a state of comparative unhappiness or distress—a state, at any rate, in which prayers may improve their condition; but that if the souls are believed to be in a state of actual suffering, then the prayers become unlawful. Surely, the greater the supposed distress the greater the need (assuming them to be of any use at all) of our prayers. And in any case the distinction between a "third place" in which the soul of the departed lacks "rest and quiet," and a "third place" in which it "suffers," is subtle in the extreme. A vague belief in purgatory of some sort is inseparable from the practice of praying for the dead. It will be noticed that Sir Herbert Jenner-Fust, in order to make way for the new doctrine, deposes the definite teaching of the Church (in its Homily) and also that of the Reformation divines, but it must be remembered that his decision affects private prayers only, and does not in any way sanction public prayers for the dead, or interpret any of the public prayers as being prayers for the dead; and he also states that the Church of England discourages such prayers. But if the learned Dean's judgment were good law we should expect to have found in all cases, since the Reformation, of gifts for prayers for souls an inquiry directed by the judge whether the prayers intended were merely private prayers not involving the doctrine of purgatory, in which case the gift should have been held to be not superstitious. But I find no trace of this point ever being raised until after the decision of *Brecks v. Woolfrey* in 1838, when the following argument was addressed to the court without effect: "Prayers for the souls of the dead are not even contrary to the doctrine of the Church of England (*Brecks v. Woolfrey*); how, then, can a gift for such prayers be an illegal use?"

It seems clear, therefore, that this distinction, though well-



known to, and acted upon by, High Churchmen of post-Elizabethan days, was unknown to the law of Church and State up to the date of this judgment of *Brecks v. Woolfrey*.

The question as to what is the Anglican doctrine lies at the root of the whole matter, and explains another argument which is not without its weight. In the earlier sets of Articles framed when the Reformation doctrines were in a transition state, "prayers for the dead" *eo nomine* were expressly condemned. The words were subsequently struck out, and do not appear in the Twenty-second of the Thirty-nine Articles. This has been regarded by some as an indication that the Church had changed its mind in the interval, and finally, in 1571, decided to allow prayers for the dead. But that it was not so is shown by the fact that about that time the Homilies were set forth by authority, and expressly stated the doctrine of the Church to be that there was no intermediate state in which the souls of the dead could be in any way aided by prayer. The Romish doctrine at the same date was that there is a purgatory (the nature and position of which it leaves undefined), and that the suffrages of the faithful, and especially the Mass, are helpful to the souls therein. The Romish Church itself does not allow prayers for souls in heaven or hell. They only pray for souls in purgatory—*i.e.*, according to the catechism now in use among Roman Catholics in England, "a place where souls suffer for a time after death on account of their sins." That there was a *fourth* place—*i.e.*, a place which is neither heaven, hell, nor purgatory—does not seem to have entered the heads of our Reformers, nor of any of the sixteenth-century controversialists, nor of the judges of our courts of law. Thus, the Homily says there are *only two* places after this life—heaven and hell—and asks, after quoting Scripture, Where is, then, the third place which they call purgatory? or where shall our prayers help and profit the dead? It seems clear, therefore, that when the Reformers condemned the "Romish doctrine concerning purgatory," in Article XXII., they considered they had condemned the practice of praying for the dead in any shape or form.

There is another law case which bears upon this question—*viz.*, the "Essays and Reviews" decision of the Privy Council. The doctrine of the Church of England being supposed to be that after death "there is no place for repentance nor yet for satisfaction," exception was taken to an essay in which the following passage occurs: "We must rather entertain a hope that there shall be found after the great adjudication receptacles suitable for those who shall be infants, not as to years of terrestrial life, but as to spiritual development—nurseries, as it were, where the stunted may become strong and the per-

verted be restored. And when the Christian Church in all its branches shall have fulfilled its sublunary office, and its Founder shall have surrendered His kingdom to the great Father, all, both small and great, shall find a refuge in the bosom of the Universal Parent, to repose or be quickened into higher life in the ages to come, according to His will." The question for the court in this case was whether this statement was in accord with certain passages from the Prayer-Book set out in the pleadings. The Homilies by consent were not included, and the Privy Council held that they did not find in those particular formularies any such distinct declaration of our Church as to the eternity of final judgment as to require them to condemn as penal the expression of hope by a clergyman that even the ultimate pardon of the wicked who are condemned in the day of judgment may be consistent with the will of Almighty God. The effect of this, shortly, is that hell is converted into purgatory.

To sum up. The Homily contains (as Article XXXV. says) a godly and wholesome doctrine—in short, the doctrine of the Church of England at the time of the Reformation. Such doctrine is in accord with the Prayer-Book. No change has been made in the Prayer-Book which has had the effect of altering the doctrine, and every attempt to effect such a change has been defeated. The courts of law and equity have always considered prayers for the dead superstitious and gifts for them illegal. But it is not illegal to pray for the dead in private (though such a practice is discouraged by the Church), provided such prayers are not for souls in "suffering"—*i.e.*, "purgatory"—and also there are no penal consequences for those who, in effect, express the belief that hell is not hell, but merely purgatory.

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## ART. V.—THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN SCOTLAND.

### II. PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE.

THE study of its past history and present vitality compels the conviction that the Scottish Episcopal Church has a great future before it. The vision of ever-widening influence and ever-increasing usefulness becomes very real when measured by the standard of progress recorded in recent years, and by the scale of activity which distinguishes every department of the Church's work at the present time. To this statement the reply may be made that the future is a quantity unknown and