

ART. III.—PRAYER-BOOK AMENDMENT.

OUR Lord and Master gave His disciples a Form of Prayer. They were to use it as He gave it, for He said, according to one Evangelist, "When ye pray, *say*, Our Father. . . ." According to another, He said, "*After this manner* pray ye"; and there are seven variations at least in the prayer as given by the two, which suggests that it was not only to be used verbatim, but to be taken as a suggestive model.

Further, in this connection our Lord warned them against "vain repetitions" (*μὴ βαττολογήσητε*), the heathen error of supposing that "much speaking" increased the efficacy of prayer; and, while disparaging the lengthy prayers of the Pharisees, He furnished a pattern for His people's prayers which is scarcely less wonderful for its brevity than for its comprehensiveness, depth, and sublime simplicity.

Now, what may we safely infer from these facts?

First, that Forms of Prayer are to be recommended, at any rate for united worship (notice the plurality of the pronoun, "*Our* Father," "*Forgive us our* trespasses"). Secondly, that they are specially liable to certain dangers, two of these being needless iteration and excessive length. Thirdly, that they should reflect the characteristics of the model Christ supplied: its reverential calmness; its chaste, concise language; its penitential humility; its trustful and obedient spirit; and include, as the model does, childlike approach to God, worship and thanksgiving, aspiration, confession, petition, deprecation, and intercession.

On these principles the Church compiled "*Liturgies*," as they are called, or Forms of Public Worship, first and foremost for Holy Communion, to which, indeed, the word *Λειτουργία* seems at first to have been exclusively applied, though it has come to be used for Forms of Public Church Service generally. These Liturgies came into existence in very early, probably in Apostolic, times, and four of them seem to have supplied special types, modifications of which, in twenty-three somewhat differing forms (for no Acts of Uniformity afflicted the Church of old), have survived to our day in the Eastern and Western Churches.

Our own Liturgy is descended from that in use at Ephesus, commonly called the Liturgy of St. John, who may quite probably have contributed to its original compilation.

Before the Reformation several different "*Uses*" or redactions of this Liturgy prevailed in the English dioceses. That of Salisbury seems to have been the most popular, and thought by our Reformers to be the best, and was taken,

after being simplified, enriched, and purged of superstitious accretions, as the basis of the first Common Prayer-Book in the English language. This was revised in 1552, in 1559, in 1604, and again in 1662. Only slight changes have been made in it in subsequent times.

Thus, our Prayer-Book is a "survival of the fittest," older forms in all cases not being discarded, but in the main retained, after careful revision. Most of the Collects are 1,300 years old; portions of the Communion Service have probably come down from the time of the Apostles.

After making all deductions, it constitutes, so far as it goes, a magnificent and monumental Manual of Public Devotions, combining in a marvellous degree simplicity and chastened fervour with reverence and dignity of language; it is rich in Scriptural thought and heavenly aspiration, and it makes no unsuitable provision for a very considerable number of the occasions under which the common worship of English Christians is likely to be held. We yield to none in appreciation and admiration of its exceeding worth and beauty.

1. But it is right to remember some words occurring in the Preface of this excellent Book, from the pen of its latest Revisers:

"The particular Forms of Divine worship being things in their own nature indifferent and alterable, it is reasonable that such changes should be made therein as should from time to time seem either necessary or expedient. . . ." "Accordingly," they go on, "such alterations as were tendered to us (by what persons or to what purpose soever tendered), as seemed in any degree requisite or expedient, we have willingly assented unto."

Nothing could be more moderate or sensible than this statement of the case; and in view of the fact that good reason seems to have been discovered for revising the Reformed Liturgy four times during the first century of its use, or about every twenty-four years on an average, it would be strange indeed if in ten times that period—*i.e.*, in 240 years after its last Revision—no sufficient ground should be discoverable for further amendment by way of correcting acknowledged mistakes, and enriching, expanding, and adapting the splendid Book. For, after all, it was the work of man, and therefore inevitably imperfect and improvable, and capable of better adaptation to altered conditions in the vastly developed life and circumstances of the Church of this world-wide Empire. And now, if so, why should England lag behind Ireland and America in this important business? Important, surely, when we consider the enormous number of individuals affected by any deficiencies or blemishes in the Book, and the

enormous number of times in which any mischief accruing from them is *en évidence*, and the intensely sacred and momentous consequence of the engagements concerned. "De minimis non curandum est"; but there can be no *minima*, nor even *parva*, in a manual which the Church is bound, I take it, to make approximate as closely to the ideal and the perfect as God's blessing on untiring labour shall enable her to make it.

It has been well said that "So precious are the short seasons spent in united worship, that no detail that can affect in any measure its holy charm and edifying power can possibly be insignificant; while little dissatisfactions arising from unwise Liturgical arrangements are believed to be answerable more often than is sometimes supposed for that first abstention from worship which, once begun, upon whatever ground, has so fatal a tendency to become *in-veterate*."

Presumably it will not be denied that the Revisions the book has already undergone have been a success; in other words, that the men of 1662 produced at least a *more suitable* book than the men of 1604, of 1552, and of 1549. It is not essential, however, to the argument, for, unless we are to ascribe inspired finality to the Prayer-Book of 1549, even unsuccessful revision of it during the succeeding century could not prove that two centuries and a half of further experience would be unlikely to yield the means, as well as fresh need, for its emendation.

For years past every speaker of weight or representative character in our Church Congresses has recognised the abundant room that exists for such amendment. Here are a few examples (all of us would not be prepared to go so far as some of the speakers quoted). "Our Liturgy," says an eminent divine, "is at once meagre and defective. It contains phrases which are stumbling-blocks to many, expressions which irritate and distress thousands of Christians. Supposing a thousand men in a town were newly converted from sin, and met, Bible in hand, free to decide what form of worship they would embrace, would the majority adopt the Prayer-Book as it stands?" Says another speaker, a Bishop and sturdy Churchman: "It is very desirable that some alterations be made and additional Services introduced. The question is not whether it is desirable, but only how to do it." Says a pronounced Evangelical: "Evangelicals say with one voice, We should very much like a Revision. I feel sure our Church would be increased tenfold." (That is rather a wild estimate. We repeat that we do not pretend to endorse the language of all advocates of revision.) Said Bishop Thorold:

“We want more elasticity in our services; we want to add to them. It all might be done without any breach of unity among us.” Said another Bishop of great influence and lofty character: “I have had continually in my mind a sense of the unsuitableness of our Service to the needs of a poor population. We want greater power to vary our Services.” Says a learned Canon: “Sorely needed is an authorized Appendix of additional prayers. The Prayer-Book is admirable, but it is not complete. We want simple services for use which need no printed forms at all, in which the minister should be absolutely free.” Says another: “For many public occasions our present Prayer-Book gives us absolutely no help . . . and accordingly we get lawlessness. . . . When men cannot evade a law which is overstrict they revolt against its bonds.” Said Lord Nelson: “Nothing would do more to restore to us the most earnest Nonconformists than to have services adapted to the masses.”

It might be well to quote speeches on the other side, but one has been unable to meet with any by Churchmen of any school at all!

Our own deliberate conviction is that, next to a gracious bedewal of our Church by the Holy Ghost, nothing is of greater consequence to her spiritual advance than Prayer-Book Amendment, and nothing more likely to retard that advance than its indefinite postponement.

No one is more thankful than we are that changes have not been, and could not be, hastily and easily made in the Book, in conformity with the demand of passing moods and majorities in our Church and Nation; but a Reform waited for in a Reformed Church—the Church of the Reformation—for 250 years can hardly be held to be a sudden and revolutionary innovation!

2. And now let us betake ourselves to the unwelcome and ungracious task of fault-finding. Why is amendment necessary?

(a) *The Rubrics are too rigid.* As it stands, the Book, even as relaxed by the Act of Uniformity Amendment Act, interdicts all addition of devotional compositions other than Scripture or hymns (as though metrical form was the complete security against erroneous matter) to the Church's Liturgical treasures, except in the single case of the Burial Service, which now in certain cases may legally be varied. The only special Services really lawful in Church besides the Forms provided two or three centuries ago are ingenious mosaics, constructed, with the aid of Bible texts, out of the latter, in strained adaptation to the wants of the present day. This was never intended by the compilers of the Book. Not

only did they recognise in terms, as we have seen, the probable expediency of change from time to time, but they deliberately introduced into the Book that principle of option, or alternative forms, which there is no reason to suppose they intended to restrict to the few cases in which they applied it. The extension of that principle beyond these limits (and not only to Psalms and Lessons, in which a certain measure of legal freedom has been conceded, but to complete Services), would, without any disturbance of the plan on which our Liturgy is constructed, afford a wholesome relief to its stiffness, and endow it with more of that capability of specialization which is claimed as the peculiar advantage of extemporaneous worship. It is surely a mistake, *e.g.*, to require the recitation of certain of the Jewish Psalms, at all and ever, in the worship of Christians.

And the Rules and Language of the Book are vexatiously rigid. Take Confirmation. The form of the Preface, and of the Bishop's question to the candidates, makes both glaringly inappropriate to persons (and there are usually some, and occasionally not a few, at a Confirmation) who have been baptized as adults, as well as to the exceptional, yet very numerous, class of those lawfully baptized in infancy, but not with sponsors; yet no liberty of language is permitted here. The Rules as to Baptism, prescribing its celebration during public worship, and the provision of a specified number of sponsors of each sex, are notoriously in abeyance (like certain rubrics of the Communion Service), and would be largely fatal to Anglican Baptism if insisted on. Again, while in favour of daily public prayers if sufficiently varied, we cannot escape from the conviction that their monotony is one chief reason why the rigid rubrical requirement of the recitation of the daily Prayers by Priests and Deacons (Bishops seem exempted), nominally in force for three centuries, is disregarded to-day by the great majority, the modified form of clerical subscription to the Prayer-Book being held by many to relax its obligations. Yet it seems regrettable that the only available cure of the excessive rigidity of Prayer-Book rules should be to leave them as they are, yet officially connive at their violation!

Iteration is akin to Rigidity. We have seen that our Saviour warns us against it, and there is far too much of it in our Book. Of each day's prayers seven-eighths are identical; of Matins and Evensong, two-thirds. How unfortunate this iteration on Good Friday, a day of intensely distinctive character, when the *Venite* and *Magnificat* or *Cantate* are plainly unsuitable, yet must be recited as usual. *Venite* would seem far less unsuited to Easter Day, when it is super-

seded, as not special enough! The fivefold iteration of Christ's matchless prayer in every full forenoon Service has found ingenious defenders, entitled to great deference, though they do not convince us; but why the iteration of human compositions, such as the Collect for the Day, often twice within ten minutes, or of almost identical petitions for the Sovereign five times in a full Morning Service, and twice at least in every Service? The iteration in identical words of somewhat lengthy Exhortations, again, violates a fundamental law of human nature. What should we think of the repetition at every Service of some magnificent exhortation, say, out of Dr. Liddon's sermons? Sermons, or sermonlike addresses, however good, will not bear frequent repetition without generating either inattention or nausea. A serious instance of rigid iteration is the direction to the Minister to repeat all the words of administration to every communicant. How increasingly common, happily, the case when this involves the repetition for each kind for even 200 communicants at a time! It is often impossible to remedy this by multiplying the number of officiating clergy. Similarly, the repetition of the beautiful benedictory prayer of the Bishop at a Confirmation over each candidate becomes a burden, when (as must be common in some dioceses) 200 or 300 candidates or more are presented, and this on an occasion when a tense condition of mind and heart in the young people renders great length in the Service specially inadvisable.

The Baptismal Service is far too long for use, as prescribed, with other Services; yet there is no authority for shortening it. The Marriage Service is coarsely injudicious, as Bishop Barry says, in some of its terms and directions (fancy a young bachelor curate having to decide whether an elderly bride is past childbearing or no!), but no relaxation is authorized. Rigidity and iteration reach a preposterous climax in the perpetual reprint and reissue of Rules for finding the "Golden Number," not merely for centuries for ever gone by, as A.D. 1600 and 1700, but for future ages more distant than Ussher dates creation in the past, up to A.D. 8500! Some of those seven elaborate Tables at the beginning of the Prayer-Book are incorrect in detail; only two of them could be of the least practical value. None of them are mentioned in the Contents of the Book. They were inserted by order of Parliament, not of the Church. Why still parade them before a Church that needs them not, and a world that laughs them to scorn?

We avow our strong conviction that to the average worshipper, by virtue of a law ruling human nature, the effect of Prayer-Book iteration is the undermining, consciously or unconsciously, of interest. After a certain limit, the respectful

attention men give to a sacred thing repeated in their ears is in inverse proportion to their familiarity with it. No doubt the dew-point, the limit of saturation, is more slowly reached in the case of some rich, suggestive words—inspired words, for example; but is there anything so sacred and beautiful as wholly to escape the operation of the law referred to, and capable of unlimited repetition without nausea?

We do not mean that nausea exactly describes the common effect of Prayer-Book iterations; it is rather numbness of mind, impaired sensibility of heart. We put it to the reader whether he seriously believes that the great mass of a Church of England choir or congregation, in singing or hearing the *Nunc Dimittis*, we will say, recited for the two thousandth or three thousandth time, are really following the familiar words, especially if sung to some elaborate "Service," with such interest and such pondering of their true application to a congregation—not easy to discern in the *Nunc Dimittis*, by the way—as to receive fresh Godward stimulus thereby. No one will think so who will carefully watch a congregation during the process; and yet if by any of our worship arrangements we fail to produce this result, and merely facilitate the deadening of the ear and heart of average Church attendants to sacred phrases, and accustom their minds either to wander the while in other directions, or else remain stagnant and inactive, what "moral and intellectual damage" we are effecting, what time and effort we are wasting, and on what a colossal scale!

In religion everything should be as definite and real as it possibly can be made, and the tendency to listless formality in worship, instead of being fostered, should be checked and counteracted by every kind of legitimate device. One effect of the iterativeness of our Liturgy on active-minded men not gifted with strong devotional instincts—and such are abundant in a highly-civilized age—is to generate fidgetiness and disrelish, followed ultimately by Church absenteeism; while others—conscientious people, but possessing only commonplace powers of mental concentration—are tormented with self-reproach, and lose much of the joy and refreshment which worship should bring, because an unfairly heavy task has been imposed on them, and too little help given them in fulfilling it, by their Church's Forms of Prayer.

(b) But the Iteration and Rigidity of the Book, coupled, I may add, with excessive length and redundancy in some directions, are scarcely less unfortunate than its incompleteness. The following list of occasions for which it makes no provision whatever, even partially, is itself incomplete: The worship of the Young; of Families; of Soldiers; of Prisoners;

of Hospitals; of Colleges; the opening and close of a Year; the appointment of a Monarch, the Governor of a Colony, a Bishop, or a Parish Priest; the admission of Converts from heresy or schism; a fair Harvest; a time of National Prosperity; the commencement or dedication of Churches; the Consecration of graveyards or of graves; a mercantile voyage; an alternative Evensong; above all, Intercession for Home and Foreign Missions. Every item in this incomplete list represents a more or less public occasion for which authorized forms are more or less desirable, yet none at all are provided in the nation's Book of Common Prayer, and they actually exceed in number those for which it does make provision!

Of course, we know that excellent forms have been devised for all of them; but if these contain anything beyond a rearrangement of the contents of a Book 250 years old, they are not strictly legitimate in Church; and none of them have full Church sanction. Their existence witnesses to the need and feasibility of expanding the Book; but until it is amended by lawful authority Clergy can only use them in Church by transgressing its present Rules, which they promised to obey, and proclaiming the failure of the Book to meet the Church's needs.

Here we may add to the deficiencies of our Prayer-Book the need of a Catechism suited to Young Children, which the Church Catechism, though most valuable, assuredly is not—indeed, was not by its compilers intended to be.

(c) A third ground for the amendment of our Prayer-Book is the very large number of detail inconsistencies, instances of practical unwisdom, anachronisms, ignorings of the Antipodes and life conditions there, mistranslations in Creeds, Canticles, Psalms, Epistles, and Gospels, obscurities, ambiguities, careless corrections of the press, and the like. He must be a bold man, for instance, who would defend the *Ornaments Rubric* or the *Rubrics in the Communion Office* as intelligible directions likely to prevent strife and secure uniformity of practice.

But one would not think of giving any list of these blemishes in the Book. We have been necessarily very close students of the Prayer-Book for many years, and have marked several hundreds of instances of such regrettable and improvable details as have been alluded to. Taking the most liberal discount off that list, amply enough will remain to make leaving the Book unamended a calamity and a disgrace.

For amendment such as would meet objections which all right-minded men would admit to be valid could not be impossible, as no change of doctrine whatsoever need be involved. The only doctrinal change we should press for seems a small matter, and could not fairly be demurred to—

the excision of the words "Our Lady" in the Calendar of Lessons for Holy Days. One is aware of no doctrinally legitimate sense in which the Blessed Virgin is entitled to that designation. It is eliminated everywhere else in the Book, and doubtless was left where it stands by an oversight. Perhaps we ought to add that the first of the two notes at the end of the Baptismal Office appears doctrinally to be regrettable. The confident assertion, on the authority of Scripture, that baptized infants, dying before they commit *actual* sin (whatever that may mean—you cannot commit *original* sin), are *undoubtedly* saved, certainly seems to suggest that there is a doubt about their salvation if dying *unbaptized*; and one really had rather not be pledged to any doctrine at all on that mysterious subject, and has never yet been shown the text of Scripture which deals with it at all, so as to warrant the confident and dogmatic assertion which our Prayer-Book makes upon the question.

3. Now, if such are some of the changes needed in the prescriptions of our Book of Common Prayer, what can be done to make them available? Two forms of Deliverance offer themselves, neither of which we could possibly recommend: (1) Evasion; (2) Defiance.

(1) As Evasion we should class the theory that, the Act of Uniformity happening in terms to have expressly prohibited other than Prayer-Book forms only in Colleges and Halls (sect. 17), they are available in Churches; or that the Book, being only a Schedule to an Act, and not in itself a document drawn up by lawyers in strict and definite terms, may be taken "in the spirit and not in the letter."

We apprehend that it is on such grounds as these that Services are now used, in Churches tinged with a particular view of Church questions, for which no Prayer-Book warrant whatever can be quoted, and we fear in some cases quite at variance with its spirit.

One would be sorry to have action of this kind on one's own conscience.

(2) Defiance is another alternative. "Boldly ignore Prayer-Book rules," it is suggested, "in deference to Catholic authority, as some of us interpret it for ourselves; or in stubborn adherence to irregular practice connived at by public usage in the past"; and the suggestion has not seldom been adopted, with it need not be said how deplorable a harvest of insubordination, and confusion, and disorder, and even prosecution! It is very consolatory to know that this attitude of defiance to authority has been getting rarer by degrees for some time past in England.

But is there no alternative to these two expedients, other

than passive and implicit compliance with all the Rules of the Prayer-Book as they stand?

Well, it is too late to get this last programme adopted, however beautiful its logic and consistency. Many Rubrics are hopelessly in abeyance. The exigencies of Colonial Church life, in particular, make certain abbreviations and relaxations so urgently desirable on grounds of common-sense and even practical necessity, that they are virtually universal. In these cases the Prayer-Book is not "evaded" under shelter of ingenious theories, nor lawlessly "defied" by unauthorized irregularities in the interest of doctrinal change; but respectful liberties are taken with literal obligations which it would be unreasonable, and which no one desires, to insist upon, and we fall back on Scripture precedent for dealing with the difficulty in this way. There is an analogy (of the *à fortiori* kind) between the rules of our Liturgy and those of the divinely-sanctioned Jewish law, and our Saviour's attitude towards the latter while in force is most instructive. I do not specially refer to His open neglect of the prescribed attitudes at the Passover meal, but to His argument in favour of Sabbath healing. He does not "evade" the rule; He does not "defy" it. He lays it down that disobedience to its letter may be justified in deference to higher claims, and instances David, who violated the law to satisfy his hunger, and the priests, who baked showbread and circumcised on the Sabbath Day. Obligations based on the needs of man are upon occasion to override those based on the importance of ritual uniformity.

Bishops, as well as other clergy, break Prayer-Book law to some extent as it is, but are justified in so doing. I venture to think that on the high ground indicated by our Lord's example they would be justified, *pending the amendment of the law*, in doing so still further. For instance, that Churchmen are justified for adopting for use in Church the forms drawn up for Induction, Consecration, Harvest Thanksgiving, etc., by Convocation, where the Bishop of the Diocese offers no objection; while the rigidity of Rubrics, in the same way, may justifiably be relaxed in practice, *strictly subject to the same condition*. The letter of the Prayer-Book will remain a perpetual reminder of the importance of substantial uniformity, the evil of needless variation, and the desirableness of an amended Book as the object of unceasing hope and endeavour. Meanwhile, the common-sense and intelligence of clergy and laity, coupled with the reverent caution of the Bishops, with whom absolute control must rest, should, under the gracious guiding of the Holy Spirit dwelling in the

Church, be a safeguard against practical extravagance and doctrinal danger.

The weak point in this programme is obvious; the Bishop who officially countenances some irregularities of which he approves may find his hands weakened for repressing others of which he disapproves. His authority may be challenged as partial and unconstitutional in its exercise. But danger of some kind is inseparable from the delay of any indispensable reform, and the Bishops' moral influence should be strong enough to counteract opposition to their action when characterized by moderation and wisdom.

As a fourth alternative, therefore, to a fraudulent evasion, a lawless defiance, and an impossible literal obedience, we recommend as a working principle frank but cautious disregard of the law in detail, by way of provisional relaxation and enlargement in use of our Book of Common Prayer by the Parochial Clergy, where the exigencies of modern Church life appear reasonably to demand it, subject to the concurrence, through their representatives, of the local laity and the countenance of the Ordinary.

The fifth (and, as we think, the only remaining) alternative—viz., their surrender of their office in view of the practical impossibility of literally fulfilling their promise of conformity to the Book—will not seriously be demanded.

Our Saviour summed up the Sabbatarian controversy with the dictum: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." Surely the Prayer-Book was made for the Church, not the Church for the Prayer-Book.

We venture to add to this already lengthy paper a reference to the way in which the Lambeth Conference of 1897 handled the subject before us.

The feeling was in favour of a reassertion (as the best available provisional solution of current difficulties) of the "Jus Liturgicum" of a See Bishop—*i.e.*, his right to adapt (without doctrinal change) the Liturgical use of his Diocese to its needs and circumstances: a truly "Catholic" usage, which the assembled Fathers considered it was not intended by the Act of Uniformity to abrogate.

A difficulty in the way of this view arises from the Act of Uniformity Amendment Act of 1872, which authorizes such adaptation within certain defined limits. It might be held, therefore, that outside those limits it was unauthorized. Archbishop Temple, however (doubtless well advised by legal experts), did not consider this fatal to the recognition of a moderate and reasonable exercise of the right referred to, and our Bishops seem increasingly disposed to avail themselves of it. The Australian Diocesans at once united in adapting

the Confirmation Service, *e.g.*, to the needs of their Dioceses, by recognising the multitudinous cases of candidates baptized as adults or without sponsors. We think that step should be taken here; also the authorization of the use of part of the "administration" of the elements to a group of communicants, restricting part (preferably the second part) to the individual participant. The length of a Communion Service when this is not done may be far too long for edification.

No modification of, or addition to, our Prayer-Book Services, however, has any vestige of warrant without at least the tacit consent of the Ordinary, with whom responsibility in all such cases must rest. It may be pointed out that a Bishop does not make the promise of conformity to the Prayer-Book that is required by a Priest at his licensing. So far his "*Jus Liturgicum*" seems supported by fact.

Yet this hazy "*Jus Liturgicum*" does not wholly meet the case. The Book itself needs revision, and it deserves as well as demands it. Its exceeding merit itself establishes its claim to emendation. A temporary cottage may be left to fall to ruin; a grand stone castle, meant to stand for ages, is well worth periodical repair, extension, and improvement in detail.

Then what is the means to the required Reform?

Obviously, the establishment and the action for this end of a Reformed Convocation, or truly representative Church Assembly of Clergy and Laity, an experimental or non-statutory form of which is shortly to be convened. If such an Assembly, duly constituted, uttering the voice of the Church as a whole, produced, under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, a Revised Prayer-Book, its introduction would, of course (so long as the Church remains established), have to be sanctioned by Parliament. But that such sanction would be withheld is surely unlikely. Far and away the best would be national, and not merely denominational, action in such a matter. But if Parliament refused all relief, the hour of Disestablishment would have struck. Utter separation of Church and State, though an enormous evil to our country, would be a preferable alternative to the bondage of Liturgical finality.

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