

The Prayer-Book and the Needs of the Day.

BY THE REV. W. H. POLAND.

I.

IT is, of course, a mere platitude to say "this is an age of progress." We are all convinced of it. The very solar system, to which we belong, is, we are told, moving on to some unknown part of the universe. It follows that no single moment can be exactly like the last. Words must change, people must change, opinions must change. Yet, it is hardly too much to say that the Church of England scarcely seems to realize this sufficiently. True, we have had a valuable Revised Version of the Holy Scriptures, which has cast much light on some obscure passages, and at the same time widened our ideas of truth. But the machinery of the Church remains much the same as it was some three or four hundred years ago. And, in many respects, we may be said to be fighting the battle of the twentieth century in sixteenth-century armour. The motto of many of its sons seems to be that of the great Georgian statesman, Walpole, "Quieta non movere," or, in more common parlance, "Let sleeping dogs lie." A timidity and nervousness, as of the aged or the weak, seems to have crept over the Church in some respects, though her activity in other respects shows emphatically that there is no need for this. Why is there such a dread in many quarters of touching the Prayer-Book? The rank and file of the Church, the congregations, are practically demanding some changes to suit the needs of the day. If the Prayer-Book is perfect, why then, of course, it would be sheer madness to interfere with it. If, however, it is imperfect and does not altogether suit our times, then it is little better than cowardice not to attempt wise, cautious and well-considered changes. In the time of Puritan despotism it was an offence to use the Prayer-Book. In the reign of James I. it was a crime to find fault with it.¹ "Cambridge passed a grace forbidding all persons

¹ *Vide* W. Page Roberts, "Conformity and Conscience," p. 109.

within the University from publicly finding fault with the doctrine or discipline of the Church of England, either by word or writing, upon pain of being suspended from their degrees." "And the Convocation of 1604 declared every man to be excommunicated who questioned the complete accordance of the Prayer-Book with the word of God." We live in more enlightened times now, or it would not be safe to issue this little brochure, for in it some criticism will appear.

But before proceeding to criticize it is a positive duty, and an act of justice, to commence with praise. If the first great gift of the Reformation to us was the Bible in English, surely the second was the Book of Common Prayer, a book of "unrivalled literary nobleness."¹ Baron Bunsen said: "We may with justice affirm that since the Canon of Scripture was closed, humanity has produced nothing which for the solid worth of its contents in relation to the religious apprehension, whether of the individual human heart or of the Church at large, can be compared either with the hymn-book of the German Church, including the prayers for special occasions, or the Common Prayer-Book of the English Church. Both are the joyful Amen of humanity to the glad message of the Bible; both are the work of the Spirit of God operating through the Church,"² while a recent historian calls it "the most wonderful achievement of any age—the greatest, next the Bible, of any human production."³

To begin with, it is strictly Biblical, and, it being so, Christians who conform to it may well consider themselves the best entitled to the name of "Bible Christians." It is hardly too much to say that almost every word of it comes from, or can be proved out of, Holy Scripture. Next, it is exceedingly ancient in origin. If the early Christian Church was modelled, to a great extent, on the Jewish Synagogue,⁴ the earliest Christian services were modelled also on its services.⁵ The eighteen set

¹ W. Page Roberts, "Conformity and Conscience," p. 13.

² "God in History," iii. 205. ³ Brewer, "Henry VIII.," ii. 472.

⁴ Smith's Dictionary, "Synagogue." ⁵ Freeman, p. 64.

forms of prayer in use in the Synagogue, the practice of reciting the Psalms, the reading of lessons, and the delivery of a sermon or discourse, formed a groundwork on which the earliest Christian services were built up. The earliest forms of prayer naturally centred round the celebration of the Holy Communion, and so early were these forms, called liturgies, introduced, that certain of them are mentioned under the names of St. Mark, St. Peter, St. James and St. John, though they may not have been committed to writing until the third century.¹

The oldest post-Apostolic prayer is found in a portion of the first Epistle of St. Clement of Rome,² and is evidently a prayer which he was accustomed to offer in church as a Pastor.³ The date of this would be about A.D. 95 to 98. Justin Martyr gives an interesting account of the usual Christian services about fifty years later. It is well known that a great many of our Collects are taken from the most ancient service-books, dating from A.D. 400 to 600, so that they are about 1,400 years old, while the *Venite* has been in use in Church services for about 1,550 years.⁴ Next, in praise of the Prayer-Book, one would like to remark on the non-controversial character of the prayers. They are not arguments or sermons. In this they are far superior to most extempore prayers by which the hearers are often, it is to be feared, handed over to what has been quaintly called "the unhandsome issues of a sudden tongue."⁵ Nevertheless, though the Prayer-Book is Biblical; though it is linked to the greatest antiquity, to the Jewish form of worship which our Lord Himself must have joined in, and to the earliest forms of Christian prayer; though it is excellent in simplicity, dignity, and spirituality; yet it is not altogether above criticism, for it was *arranged* in comparatively modern times from various Cathedral uses in our land (such as those of Salisbury, Hereford, Bangor, York, and Lincoln), which were themselves derived from primitive liturgies, and from certain early books of devotion.

¹ W. Trollope.

² Schaff, Hertzog, Encycl., "Liturgy."

³ Bishop Lightfoot.

⁴ Campion.

⁵ Bishop Taylor, quoted by Page Roberts.

The first Prayer-Book was issued in 1549 (the second year of the reign of Edward VI.), the second in 1552, which was much the same as the book we now use. But it was revised in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, again in the reign of James I. (1604), and again in 1661, the reign of Charles II. This brings us down fairly near to our own times; and at this time—viz., 1661¹—were introduced the second prayer for Fair Weather, the two prayers for Ember seasons, the prayer for Parliament, the prayer for All Conditions of Men, and the General Thanksgiving. There were also some further alterations made at the same time, including the introduction of some new Collects. Now, the points for consideration are these: Can the Church not as safely revise the Prayer-Book now as in the reign of Charles II.? Is the Holy Spirit no longer coming into the world and acting through the Church? Are our divines less scholarly than those of 1661? Is our knowledge of Christian liturgies and antiquities less than theirs? Are the men of to-day less likely to be charitable, wide-minded, and discreet than the men of that day? Surely all these questions must be answered in the negative. And, if so, a case for revision is made out.

The Prayer-Book is a wonderful book; but “we have no duty towards its *framers*.”² They were men like ourselves; in some respects we may say inferior, for it was an age when Christians of all schools of thought were too apt to persecute and even destroy each other.

Any revision undertaken would, we feel sure, considering the great desire happily prevalent in these days for unity and concord, be designed not to cast members out of the Church, but to retain as many of different views as possible, and even to draw others outside the Church within its pale again. In fact, we feel sure it would be designed not to be more exclusive, but to be more inclusive even than it is at present. In this it would follow the spirit of the simplest, and in its inception the

¹ Procter.

² Newman, “Tract XC.”

most ancient of the Church's rules of faith¹—the Creed commonly called the Apostles' Creed.

Next, we imagine such a revision would have as a leading principle to alter as little as possible, to exclude as little as possible, in fact would take the line of enrichment rather than of impoverishment. And lastly, we imagine, it would very carefully consider the needs of the day, so that there might be greater elasticity *allowed*, needless repetition avoided, and rubrics appointed permitting a wise and cautious curtailment of too long and wearisome services.

I will now proceed to give a few examples of what some would like to see by way of illustration.

II.

1. In the Order for Morning and Evening Prayer some addition to the opening sentences would be welcome, especially if arranged to suit the greater seasons of the Church, as in the American Prayer-Book;² also an *alternative* short exhortation, as found in that book, as follows: "Let us humbly confess our sins unto Almighty God." This would be convenient, especially for use on week-days when only "two or three are gathered together." It would be convenient, too, if the prayer for All Conditions of Men were printed *in* the offices for Morning and Evening Prayer, and a clause might well be introduced before the word "finally" such as "We beseech thee to bless and preserve our King, and all the Royal Family, and to give grace and wisdom to all in authority that they may minister true justice to the people, and that we may live a peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." Such words to be used in the place of the State prayers, but to be omitted when such State prayers are used. It was, in the opinion of many, the original intention to include some such clause, as the word "finally," indeed, seems to suggest, it being somewhat needlessly introduced.³

It would be a great advantage if, when there is an Ante-

¹ Lumby, 112; Campion.

² Issued 1790.

³ Procter, p. 262.

Communion Service or a celebration of the Holy Communion, Morning Prayer should cease at the end of the third Collect, as in the first Prayer-Book of Edward VI., for in the Collect for the King's Majesty, and the prayer for the Church Militant, we have practically all the State prayers over again.

As regards the Lessons, many think a new lectionary most desirable, and that some mere historical lessons now read on Sundays might well be omitted, and some very desirable ones from the prophets substituted. And it would be a great gain if at the Morning Service, when there is no Communion or Ante-Communion Service, the Epistle and Gospel might be read at the lectern in the place of the Second Lesson. This would not be without ancient precedent.

2. The Litany ought surely to be said sometimes at afternoon and evening services. There are some people who can rarely attend church in the morning, and who, therefore, seldom join in this wonderful and comprehensive Congregational Prayer, in which no one is forgotten, from the King upon his throne to the child in its cradle, from the traveller by land or sea to the captive languishing in the dungeon. The richest of our prayers is the Litany—the great Supplication—and in every respect the most inclusive, since in it we entreat that it may please God to have mercy upon all men.

3. We are, I hope, all good and loyal subjects of King George. But we may pray even for a good King too much. A little anecdote will serve to explain. A concert was once being given in a country parish, and a poor woman invited to attend it, one of the incentives being that she would hear "God save the Queen" sung; to which she replied: "And why not sing God save us all, as well as the Queen?" There is something in this. We ought to find *room* for some other prayers without overlooking the Sovereign. Is there not a certain amount of vain repetition? The grand prayer in the Accession Service for unity ought surely to be more frequently used, and an additional comprehensive prayer introduced for all those in poverty, affliction, sickness, danger, doubt, or perplexity. Room should be found

for such prayers as these in the Order for Morning and Evening Prayer.

4. The prayers for Rain, Fair Weather, etc., require a little revision. And is there not a great need of a few prayers which might be used in the place of the State prayers on Rogation days, at a Service of Intercession for Missions, at Harvest Festivals, and on Hospital Sunday ?

5. The Athanasian Creed, which in the opinion of some is a Canticle rather than a Creed ;¹ which some hold to have been composed about A.D. 430, but which is of much later date in the opinion of others of authority, who hold it to have been composed, or at least its two parts brought together, between A.D. 813 to 850 ;² which, it is agreed, was not the work of St. Athanasius at all ; which is not in use in the Greek Church ; which is not found in the American Prayer-Book ; which has ceased to be recited in the Irish Protestant Church ; which was not introduced into our country until about the ninth century ; moreover, which is later in date than the Nicene Creed, which was intended to be the final Creed of the Church—this Creed, the Creed of St. Athanasius so called, many would like to see treated as a Christian Psalm or Canticle, like the *Te Deum*, rather than as an exposition of faith required of all. Furthermore, certain verses which give offence to many, and (unless said with certain secret understandings and mental reservations) seem to go beyond the Scriptures in direct assertion, might well be altered, excised, or at least inserted in brackets, so that they might be omitted, if desired.

6. The Psalter also, it is contended, requires some rearrangement and revision : Psalms are wanted for the 31st day of the month, for Harvest Thanksgivings and for other special occasions. And what has been said of the Athanasian Creed might well be said of those Psalms known as the Imprecatory or Maledictory Psalms, in which there are sentiments which no Christian can properly sympathize with, as they are indicative of a zealous but barbarous age, and do not coincide with the

¹ Called anciently, " Sermo," or " Psalmus." ² Lumby, Swainson.

Spirit of Christ, who on one occasion had to rebuke His disciples for displaying such sentiments, saying unto them, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of."¹

7. In the Communion Service, which breathes the Spirit and, to a great extent, reproduces the exact words of some of the most ancient Liturgies, there is, probably, little many would like to alter, nor would it be easy to enrich it. One would like, however, to see the American Prayer-Book again copied in one respect. After the recitation of the Ten Commandments, the minister may say, "Hear also what Our Lord Jesus Christ saith: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great Commandment. And the second is like unto it: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two Commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

8. The Marriage Service, which is really two services in one, might with advantage be condensed, and certain portions which belong to a ruder age, and are somewhat shocking in the ears of some who hear them for the first time, might be modified or excised. Is it quite true always to say, "With all my worldly goods I thee endow," when, possibly, relatives have just been uttering some protest against an insufficient settlement?

9. In the Baptismal Service, the Exhortation might be amplified to show more clearly the Church argument for infant baptism. After "I will," one would like to see the words added, "the Lord being my helper," or "I will endeavour so to do, the Lord being my helper," as in the Baptismal Service for those of Riper Years. Some latitude might be allowed as to godparents. The child's parents might be allowed to stand. When necessary, as in ancient days, one only might be required—viz., one male godparent for a male, and one female for a female. Our own rubric was only inserted in 1662.²

10. It is always difficult to get people to come and take part in the Communion Service; perhaps there would be some-

¹ S. Luke ix. 55.

² Campion.

what less difficulty if the cursings of the law (which can be well explained, but which all the explanation in the world does not tend to make acceptable) were omitted, and if this beautiful and necessary service were to commence with the Exhortation, or Psalm li.

11. It is probable that no one would raise objections to the remodelling of the service for the Visitation of the Sick. Very rarely is it used in its entirety, and many additional prayers are required, and have to be found and used by the clergy from other parts of the Prayer-Book, from books of ancient Collects, and collections of prayers not issued by authority.

12. The Catechism would be enriched by having added to it the supplement adopted by the Lower House of Convocation in 1887.

13. Throughout the book the rubrics undoubtedly require revision. Some are practically obsolete and never acted upon. A few words also might well be altered since they have lost their original sense and taken on of late years a different signification (*e.g.*, "With my body I thee *worship*," meaning honour).

14. At most Diocesan Conferences the subject of Prayer-Book revision has been discussed, and the Lower House of Convocation, by a considerable majority, has decided in favour of it. Few will perhaps agree with all that has been said in this paper. No one will agree to everything. Still, I think many will find some points of agreement, and will be interested to investigate the subject; and it is a subject that concerns every member of the Church.

The Prayer-Book, to end where we began, contains, we all feel, far more excellencies than deficiencies. When the work of revision is attempted we trust the most capable and wise men will be chosen to deal with the matter. And we should one and all pray that they may be guided and governed in their labours by God's Holy Spirit, so that "all who profess and call themselves Christians may be led into the way of truth, and hold the faith in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace and in righteousness of life."