

where a change hath been made of things advisedly established (no evident necessity so requiring) sundry inconveniences have thereupon ensued ; and those many times more and greater than the evils, that were intended to be remedied by such change." . . .

" Our general aim therefore in this undertaking was, not to gratify this or that party in any their unreasonable demands ; but to do that which to our best understandings we conceived might most tend to the preservation of peace and unity in the Church ; the procuring of reverence and exciting of piety and devotion in the publick worship of God," etc.

CHANGES IN MORNING AND EVENING PRAYER, LITANY, ETC.

BY THE REV. CANON G. D. OAKLEY, M.A., Vicar of Jesmond,
Newcastle-on-Tyne.

THE discussions to which the Revision of the Prayer Book has so far given rise have centred mainly round the Holy Communion Office, so that the proposals relating to the rest of the Prayer Book have been somewhat overshadowed—at least, they have not received that careful consideration which they deserve.

The paper which is to follow this will deal with " The Occasional Offices." I have been asked to confine myself to the proposed changes in Morning and Evening Prayer, the Litany, etc. Happily, these changes are, for the most part, of a non-controversial character, and we shall most of us probably agree that, on the whole, they go a long way towards meeting the demands of the altered circumstances of the time in which we live.

It is now nearly three centuries since the Prayer Book was revised. Those centuries have witnessed changes in our national and social life, the magnitude of which it is almost impossible for us to conceive. It is no small tribute to our Book of Common Prayer that during all those years of change and upheaval the English people have found in its forms of services the most fitting medium for the expression of their common worship.

It is not, however, a detraction to say that the time has come for the Prayer Book to be revised. Whatever differences there may be as to the particular form or forms which revision should take, there is, I think, general agreement as to the need of revision itself.

This *need* may be illustrated in three ways : First, there is need for shorter services ; second, there is need for services more in harmony with our modern conceptions of the Christian revelation ; third, there is need for greater enrichment. I will deal as briefly as possible with these three great needs, and endeavour to show how the

proposed changes in Morning and Evening Prayer and the Litany are designed to meet them.

I.

In the first place—the need for shorter services. In the recent debates on Prayer Book Revision in the House of Bishops, the Bishop of Durham said that in his opinion there was no public demand for revision at all. That may be so, but what would happen if the Bishop of Durham, or any other Bishop, were to require of his clergy a strict adherence to the letter of our present Prayer Book? What would happen if, say next Sunday morning, the clergy throughout England obeyed literally the rubrics of the Prayer Book and had Matins down to the end of the second Lesson, then possibly a Baptism, and then the rest of matins down to the end of the third Collect, followed by the Litany, and ante-Communion service, Sermon, and so on. What *would* happen? I venture to think something would happen which would amount to a very real public demand for revision. The fact that there is at present no such demand for revision is, as the Bishop of Durham himself suggests, that changes have already been made without legal authority but with complete immunity from legal consequence. The fact is, the clergy, in order to adapt the services of the Church to the needs of the present day, have taken matters into their own hands, and I imagine no serious objection can be raised against such necessary adaptation, but unfortunately, when once the law is broken, persistently and with impunity broken, the way is opened up for the disregard of law and order altogether, and the result is every man becomes, in matters essential as well as non-essential, a law unto himself, and that is the state of things with which we are confronted at the present time. One of the main objects of Prayer Book Revision is to bring this present chaotic state of things to an end, and to make it possible to meet the demand for shorter services in ways prescribed by lawful authority.

Let us now turn to the changes proposed with this end of shortening the services in view.

1. Both at Morning and Evening Prayer the omission of the exhortation every Sunday, excepting the first Sunday in Advent and the first Sunday in Lent.

2. The provision of a shortened form of confession and absolution following the words "Let us humbly confess our sins unto Almighty God."

3. The permission to commence Morning Prayer with the versicle "O Lord, open Thou our lips," when Morning Prayer immediately precedes the Holy Communion, and also permission to end Morning Prayer with the canticle after the second Lesson, or with the addition of the salutation and the second or third Collect. It will be observed that in all these proposed changes there is no contemplation of an Evening Communion.

4. The shortening of the Litany, and the further shortening of the Litany when it immediately precedes Holy Communion.

It may be well to observe at this point that the rubric regulating the use of the Litany requires that it shall be said or sung on Sundays—excepting Easter Day and Whit-Sunday. Now the question arises—At what time on Sundays? There is no provision made for its use as part of Evening Prayer. The rubric referring to the use of the Litany after the third Collect of Morning Prayer stands unaltered. So then, it seems that the Litany must be said or sung every Sunday either as a separate service or on Sunday morning with shortened Morning Prayer and with the Holy Communion when there is one. In this latter case the service will still be unduly long. The Revised Prayer Book of the Canadian Church seems to me to be an improvement on the proposals before us, in that it requires the Litany to be said at least one Sunday in the month!

Then, lastly, Evening Prayer may be considerably shortened by the use of “an alternative ending” after the third Collect. These, then, are the changes proposed to meet the demand for shorter services, and to make it possible to combine one service with another without imposing on the congregation too great a strain.

II.

Then there is the need for services more in harmony with our modern conceptions of the Christian revelation. One of the gravest defects of our present services, I venture to think, is that they contain elements which it is difficult for the ordinary worshipper to reconcile with his conception of the mind and spirit of Christ. It is not too much to say that many earnest and thoughtful people have been either alienated from the services of the Church altogether, or held at the cost of much heartsearching and pain because of the unchristian sentiments to which the worshippers, who take part in those services, are sometimes committed.

Take, for instance, the recital of the so-called Athanasian Creed, which our present Prayer Book requires on thirteen days in the year. I know some of the most devoted members of my congregation who absent themselves from church on Trinity Sunday morning, and many others who, though present, refuse to take part in the recital of that creed. They do not understand it, and they object to it on the ground that in its severity it goes beyond anything required by our Lord as a condition of true discipleship.

Or take again the Psalms. As the Bishop of Chichester said the other day: “There are passages in the Psalms where the text is corrupt or the meaning of the Hebrew quite uncertain and—and this is the point which I am emphasizing—Psalms or portions of Psalms which are liable to be used to express an unchristian attitude towards personal enemies.” I need not trouble you with references, but there is that notorious passage which runs: “Blessed shall he be that taketh thy children and throweth them against the stones” (Ps. cxxxvii). Thinking people nowadays simply refuse to give expression to such a sentiment as that. It is all very well

to say, in the words of the Report of the E.C.U. Committee on Prayer Book Revision, that "*the individual worshipper is free to affix his own meaning to traditional expressions which have come down from the past and require a subjective re-interpretation in order to fit them to the religious experience of the present,*" and there may be here and there those who understand and can make use of what is called "*the mystical or allegorical method of interpretation,*" but, as that report goes on to say, "*there are many members of the Church of England who have never heard of the mystical interpretation,*" and we might add—"who are quite incapable of performing the mental gymnastics which that method involves." It is for such folk as these that the Prayer Book needs to be revised. After all, the Prayer Book is for the Church, not the Church for the Prayer Book, and the Church is composed not of liturgical experts, but of ordinary men and women who mean what they say and say what they mean. One of the brightest features of modern times is what has been described as a "*Rediscovery of the Christ of the Gospels.*" To-day we see the Christ as we have never seen Him before, and no one who has really seen Him and caught His spirit can give utterance in Christian worship to those expressions in the Psalms to which I have referred.

To meet this demand for services more consistent with Christian sentiment the use of the Athanasian Creed has been made optional, the Creed itself has been revised and the Psalter has been revised. It has been revised on strictly conservative lines. To quote Dr. Ryle, who presided over the Revision Committee. He says: "Our revision leaves nearly forty Psalms wholly unaffected. There are over thirty Psalms in each of which only one verse is altered. Only such changes have been made as to remove from the Psalter the chief blemishes arising from obscurity, unintelligibility, or gross mistranslation, and those passages which are unsuitable for public Christian worship." The measure for the permissive use of the Revised Psalter only requires now the sanction of Parliament and it will become law.

III.

Finally we come to the need for greater enrichment. The great, joyful, and solemn festivals of the Church's year come round, and there is often little, or nothing, apart from special hymns, to draw attention to them. Easter Day is the one exception when, instead of the *Venite*, we sing the Easter Anthem, "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us, let us therefore keep the feast." It is proposed that both before and after the *Venite* an appropriate Invitatory shall be said or sung on the Sundays in Advent, Christmas Day, the Feast of the Epiphany, and so on down to Trinity Sunday. This will supply a long-felt want.

Moreover, it scarcely needs to be said that forms of services drawn up three hundred years ago cannot be adequate to express the thoughts and aspirations of the present time. Three hundred years ago England contained a rural population. There were

no large centres of industry such as we have to-day. Social and industrial problems were practically unknown. The invention of the steam engine, the growth of commerce, the discovery of electricity and of the uses to which it can be put—these and many other things have brought us into the closest contact with the nations of the world. We have our colonies in every quarter of the globe inhabited by our own kith and kin. Then there is the great heathen world with its tremendous claims upon the Church of Christ. It is only during the past century or so that there has been anything like an adequate realization on the part of the Christian Church at home of those claims. And so to-day the hearts of Christian men and women are filled with yearnings and aspirations for which our Book of Common Prayer provides no adequate utterance.

An attempt is made in the proposed changes to meet this need. Suffrages have been added to the Litany, and a considerable number of prayers and thanksgivings for use upon several occasions. I cannot say I think they supply all that we want. As one whose work lies in a great seaport and in the heart of a great mining industry, I should like to see special prayers for seamen and miners. The work in which these men are engaged is fraught with great peril, and congregations largely consisting of their relatives and friends would specially value some form of intercession on their behalf. In the prayers for missions there is no reference to medical missions and educational missions. There is a lamentable lack of prayers for work among the young, and no prayers suitable for children's services.

Personally, I should like to see a separate book of prayers, and intercessions and litanies on the lines of a little book recently published by the S.P.C.K. entitled *Acts of Devotion*, and permission to use such a book in conjunction with the Prayer Book. Nevertheless, the proposals of N.A. 84 are a great step forward in meeting the demand for greater enrichment, shorter services, services more in harmony with the Christian revelation, and greater enrichment. These are our present needs, and because the proposed changes in Morning and Evening Prayer go so far in meeting those needs I venture to hope that they will be accepted by all. It would be a thousand pities if our differences with regard to the Holy Communion Office were allowed to deprive us of so much that is really good and necessary. For myself I would say, let the Holy Communion Office remain as it is for the present; as for the rest of the proposals, let us have them, and the sooner we have them the better. For no longer will it be possible for anyone to say of us Evangelicals that we are law breakers like the rest who break the law in matters far more essential, and with a Prayer Book thus revised to meet the demands of our own time the Church of England will be stronger than she has ever been. She will hold her own; more than that, she will, I believe, reclaim many who have lapsed from her fold.