

THE
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REVIEW.

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REVIEW.

Essays and Dissertations in Biblical Literature. By a Society of Clergymen. Vol. I. Containing chiefly translations of the works of German critics. New York. G. & C. & H. Carvill, 1829. Pp. 567, 8vo.

The importance of biblical literature is gradually rising to its appropriate value in the estimation of many of our clergymen. To those whose acquirements and taste have led them to feel a deep interest in the progress of theological literature in our country, and whose biblical studies have made them sensible of the want of more ample means for extending their researches, the attention recently awakened to this subject cannot fail to be highly gratifying. For deep and original investigation in this productive field our country has hitherto laboured under peculiar disadvantages, which, although diminished by the productions of every passing year, must long continue to be felt. Our public libraries are not stored with ancient manuscripts, accumulated by the contributions and collections of successive centuries; our geographical location cuts us off from many important facilities of acquiring a radical knowledge of oriental languages, literature, and cus-

an acquaintance with the only medium through which God communicated to us his revelation? They are extremely few in this land, few in the ministry, and few among those who are preparing for this sacred office. This is a subject which should occupy more thoughts in the church, and more attention in the schools of theology. Something must be done to elevate the standard of biblical knowledge, and thereby depress the philosophizing theories. It has been said that the church needs men of active labour more than men of learning; but the truth of this is questionable, unless learning means skill in metaphysical and philosophical theories; then it is true, and the fewer of such the better. But the church in this land is greatly deficient in men of biblical learning. The mischiefs of perverted learning can never be prevented or obliterated by ignorance, however active and laborious. Sound biblical knowledge and plain gospel truth must be restored to their places, and then the work will be done.

REVIEW.

A Letter from a Blacksmith to the Ministers and Elders of the Church of Scotland; in which the manner of Public Worship in that Church is considered; its inconveniences and defects pointed out, and methods for removing them humbly proposed. 12mo. Pp. 80. R. P. & C. Williams. Boston. 1824.

This letter was originally published in Scotland, between seventy and eighty years ago, and though purporting to be the work of a "Blacksmith," was, no doubt, written by one accustomed to literary pursuits, who wished, under the disguise of an humble mechanic, to exhibit his strictures with less pretension, and consequently with more force. The writer also presents himself before his readers as a zealous Presbyterian, an honest and devoted friend of the church of Scotland; and professes, in this character, to be earnestly desirous of her reformation as to various points in her mode of worship. His proposed reformation, however, is all of such

a character, as to leave little room for doubt, that he is not what he professes to be, but an Episcopalian at heart, under Presbyterian colours; and that his desire is not so much to *reform* as entirely to *revolutionize* the worship of the church of *Scotland*, and reduce it to an entire conformity with that of her southern sister.

The publication in this country (which has recently come to our knowledge) is made by our Episcopal neighbours, evidently for the purpose of turning into ridicule the Presbyterian mode of worship, and thus, indirectly, recommending liturgies. This is evident, from the slightest inspection of the names of those booksellers in the title page for whom the work was particularly printed, and also, from the advertisement at the close, respecting the places and rates at which it may be obtained for extensive circulation, by the dozen or hundred. Of this, however, we make no complaint. We are perfectly willing to have our worship and order, as well as our doctrines, subjected to the most rigid scrutiny, and will cordially thank any man, or body of men, who will point out to us an error, and enable us to correct it. In the exercise, then, of the same liberty which we are willing to yield to others in reference to our opinions and practices, we shall use the freedom to make such remarks on the letter under consideration, as appear to us adapted to place in a full light the subject of which it treats.

When this literary "Blacksmith" finds fault with the church of *Scotland* for neglecting the stated reading of the scriptures in her public service, we have every disposition to unite with him, and to say, that wherever such neglect exists, it ought to be corrected. But such neglect makes no part of presbyterianism. So far as it has existed, or now exists in *Scotland*, it is contrary to the express injunction of her "Directory for the Public Worship of God"; and we rejoice to know, that while the same injunction is contained in our own "Directory," it is generally followed in those parts of the church with which we are most acquainted.

Again, when the writer enters his protest against some of the circumstances which have been allowed to attend the ancient mode of administering the *Lord's supper* in the church of *Scotland*, he may at least be heard without rebuke. Indiscretions and irregularities, we doubt not, have often been admitted on such occasions, against which all lovers of pure and undefiled religion will be ready to lift up their voice. Yet,

we have no hesitation in saying, that while we like levity, eccentricity, fanaticism, or any species of unhallowed passion, in the management of sacred things, as little as our neighbours, we had much rather see the life and power of pious affection, even though occasionally attended with some undesirable ebullitions, than the lifeless coldness of formality; freezing up every thing, not so much in that vital, and beautiful, and healthful *order* which God has appointed, as in the rigidity of spiritual death. When *Whitefield* preached, and when the power of that truth which he dispensed was made effectual to the hopeful conversion of thousands, some irregularities, no doubt, occasionally occurred, which his friends lamented, and which he himself, in the end, did not attempt to justify. Yet would not every enlightened friend of the Redeemer's kingdom unfeignedly rejoice, if scenes, such as that holy man of God was permitted to witness, even with all their accompaniments, should pervade the world? When the pious are collected, roused, and animated to peculiar feeling; and when the ignorant and impenitent are awakened, impressed, convinced of sin, and brought to the Saviour, the enlightened friend of religion will "thank God, and take courage," even though he should see something to deplore mingling itself with the apparent triumphs of the cross.

But as the greater part of this little volume is taken up with statements and reasonings intended to discredit *extemporary prayer* and to recommend *liturgies*, we shall principally attend to this general object in the sequel.

We by no means think the use of prescribed forms of prayer unlawful. There are multitudes of excellent people who think them convenient, attractive, and edifying. With these we find no fault. May they experience in the use of them more and more of that comfort and edification which they seek! We should think ourselves acting an unworthy part, if, in relation to such a point, we were capable of attempting to disturb the devotions, and ridicule the preferences of any serious Christians. Millions, we question not, through the medium of precomposed forms, have been built up in faith and holiness unto salvation. And if any serious persons find such forms better adapted to promote their spiritual benefit than extemporary prayer, they would not be faithful to their own souls if they should reject the use of them. Nothing, therefore, that we are about to offer, has for its object to make con-

verts to our mode of worship. We would, on no account, wound the feelings or unsettle the convictions of any pious Episcopalian who has been long accustomed to consider the use of the Book of Common Prayer as a *sine qua non* to his Christian devotion. But when the zealous advocates of liturgies go further, and undertake to judge for others as well as themselves; when they attempt to cover with ridicule every other mode of social prayer than that which *they* have thought proper to adopt; when they represent extemporary prayer as indecorous, ridiculous, and fanatical; when they pronounce those who find it for their edification, and deem it a duty to pray without a stinted form, to be acting the part of rebels and schismatics, criminally departing from God's prescribed plan, and rejecting, as some have asserted, what all sober, regular Christians, in all ages, have used, there is surely no impropriety in saying a word in our own defence. This, and this only, is the object of all that shall follow. Not to disparage the opinions or the practices of our neighbours; but simply to assign some of the reasons why we cannot unite with them; and why we are constrained to think that they have not yet adequately considered the grounds of our decision. It is no part of Christian meekness to hear our sacred things, from time to time, misrepresented and vilified, without taking the trouble, or feeling a disposition to lift a voice in their favour.

The questions which the contents of this book call upon us to discuss, are such as these—Is there any warrant in *scripture* for prescribed forms of prayer? Have we any evidence that they were at all in use in the three or four first ages after the apostles? Is *confining* ourselves to written forms, on the whole, expedient and useful? We shall endeavour to answer each of these questions with as much candour and brevity as possible.

1. Is there any warrant in scripture for the use of prescribed forms of prayer?

The writer of this little volume, indeed, very unceremoniously and confidently asserts, that the use of liturgies has been uniform in the church in all ages; that all men, all religions, and at all periods until the *fifteenth* century, (we suppose he means the *sixteenth*), have agreed as unanimously in the use of forms of prayer for public worship, as they did in the belief of a God; that God himself prescribed forms of prayer for the Jews; that the worship of the syna-

gogue was by such a form; that our Saviour prescribed a form to his disciples; nay, that it is evident our Saviour generally used a form of prayer himself, in pouring out his own heart to his Father in heaven!

These assertions may do very well for a "Blacksmith," who may be supposed to be more familiar with his anvil than either with the Bible or with ecclesiastical history; and who may be ready to adopt, without examination, and to repeat by rote what others, little less ignorant than himself, may have said in his hearing. But that they have scarcely a shadow of truth in them, every well informed person must know.

With respect to the Old Testament church, we know of no evidence that they had any forms which could with propriety be called a *liturgy*, at any period of their existence. They had psalms and other inspired writings which were either read, recited, or sung; and they had some forms of words with which they were accustomed to perform certain rites, and to bless the people. But the church of *Scotland* had all these, and more, at the date of this letter; yet our "Blacksmith" charges them with having *no liturgy*. And the Presbyterian church in the United States has, and constantly uses, all these; yet we were never considered as having a liturgy, so far as we know. With respect to forms of prayer in the Jewish synagogue, the writer before us is very positive that they were in constant use. But we know not on what grounds this assertion is made. The Old Testament scriptures do not give the least hint of the existence of such forms of prayer. Josephus and Philo are both profoundly silent respecting them. And nothing can be more evident to every candid reader, than that the *eighteen prayers*, as they are commonly called, mentioned by Vitringa, Prideaux, and others, are forgeries; that is, they carry on their face that they were not composed, as is alleged, before the advent of the Saviour, but since the dispersion, when there was neither temple nor sacrifice. We do not positively assert that there were no forms of prayer used in the ancient synagogue service; but we do say, with fearless confidence, that there is no clear evidence that there was any such thing. And we must further say, that if prescribed forms of prayer not only existed, but held so important a place in the worship of the Old Testament church, as some modern friends of liturgies are disposed to imagine, it is, indeed, passing strange that we do not find, in all the inspired writings, or in any other authentic work, the least hint or allusion respecting them.

If forms of prayer had been indispensable, or even invariably used, in social worship, in all ages, as the writer before us imagines, we might have expected Moses, and Ezra, and Nehemiah, and Solomon, above all others, to have employed them, on the great public occasions on which they were called upon to address the throne of grace as the mouth of assembled myriads. Yet, we presume, no one can peruse the prayers which they employed, without perceiving that they could not have been written before they were used; but came warm from the heart, and were afterwards committed to writing by the direction of God.

With respect to the New Testament dispensation, we apprehend that the slightest impartial inquiry will convince any one, that we have quite as little solid evidence from this, in favour of liturgies, as from the Old. Much use, indeed, in this controversy, has been made of that form of prayer which our Saviour taught his disciples, at their particular request, commonly called the *Lord's Prayer*. But we are persuaded that a candid attention to every circumstance connected with the delivery of that prayer, will convince any one that it furnishes no proof whatever of either the necessity or duty of prescribed forms of devotion. We believe that it was never designed by our Lord to be adopted as a permanent and precise *form* of prayer; but only as a *general directory*, intended to set forth the topics, or general matter of prayer; and our reasons for thinking so are the following:—This prayer, taken alone, is not, strictly speaking, adapted to the New Testament dispensation. When it was delivered, the Old Testament economy was still in force, and the setting up of the New directed to be prayed for as future. It contains no direction for asking in the name of Christ, as the express injunction of our Saviour renders now necessary. It is not delivered in the same words by the several evangelists, and of course, we cannot suppose the use of the *ipsissima verba*, to say the least, indispensably necessary. We hear no more of its use, by the inspired Apostles, or the primitive Christians, during the Apostolic age. And it was not for several centuries after that age that this form of prayer was considered as proper to be introduced into the service at every season of public worship. For these reasons we are persuaded that the Lord's Prayer was never intended to be used as a strict form; and, of course, that it affords no argument in favour of prescribed liturgies; and in this opinion we are fortified by the judgment of many distin-

guished individuals, ancient and modern. Augustine expresses the decisive opinion, that Christ, in delivering this prayer to his disciples, gave it as a *model*, rather than a *form*. He says expressly, that he did not intend to teach his disciples what *words* they should use in prayer, but what *things* they should pray for; and understands it to be meant chiefly as a directory for *secret* and *mental* prayer, where words are not necessary. —*De Magistro*, cap. 1. In this opinion Grotius agrees, as appears in his commentary on Matthew vi. 9.

Again; we would ask the most zealous friend of liturgies, whether written forms of prayer were used in *any* of the instances of social worship recorded in the apostolic history? Had Paul a written form when he kneeled down and prayed with the elders of Ephesus, on taking leave of them, to see their faces no more? Did Paul and Silas make use of a *book* when, at midnight, they “prayed and sang praises to God, in the prison at Phillippi? Had Paul a prescribed form when, at Tyre, he “kneeled down on the shore and prayed” with a large body of disciples, with their wives and children, who had kindly visited him and ministered to his wants, when he touched at that city in the course of a long voyage? Can we suppose that the body of pious people, male and female, who had assembled at the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, to pray for the liberation of the apostle Peter, made use of a form in pleading for the welfare and usefulness of that eminent minister of Christ? Is it possible to suppose that the church at Ephesus was furnished with a liturgy, when Paul, in writing to Timothy while there, thought it necessary to give him such pointed and specific directions concerning some of the topics proper to be introduced in public prayer? We have never heard of any one so unreasonable as to imagine that there could have been a written form used on any of these occasions, or, indeed, on any other recorded in the New Testament history. The primitive Christians, it is true, had psalms and hymns, and probably a uniform mode of administering sacraments and blessing the people; but so have the Presbyterian church, and, indeed, all other churches which reject prescribed forms of prayer in public worship. In short, if there be the smallest shred of evidence that a liturgy, properly so called, was ever used in any of the apostolic churches, it has never met our eye; and it would be strange, indeed, if any thing of that kind were in constant use, or even in use at all, without some trace of it, more or less distinct, appearing

in the inspired history, or, at least, in some of the epistles to the various churches.

The next question which demands our notice is, Have we any evidence that liturgies were at all in use during the first three or four centuries after the apostles?

The advocates of liturgies generally assert, without hesitation, that they *were* in constant use during the period in question. Yet they have never been able to produce evidence of such a fact. Still they abate nothing of the confidence of assertion. We are reduced, then, to what is commonly considered by logicians a hard task, viz. that of *proving a negative*. Yet even *this*, we think, in the present instance, may, without much difficulty, be done.

When the learned Bingham, in his *Origines Ecclesiasticæ*, and other writers of similar views, assert, and endeavour to prove, that liturgies were in use in the ages immediately succeeding that of the apostles, they endeavour to make good their assertion by such testimony at the following:—That the early Christians had evidently psalms and hymns which had been reduced to writing, which were well known among them, and which they united in singing; that they had, for the most part, a form of words, which was commonly employed in administering baptism and the sacramental supper; and that in blessing and dismissing the people, they commonly adopted the usual apostolical benediction, or some other well known form of a similar kind. These writers have not a single fact or testimony to show in support of their assertion but something of this kind. Now it is plain, that all this may be granted without in the least degree helping their argument. We have all this, as is well known, and as was before observed, in our worship; and yet we are generally considered as having no liturgy. Nay, we know of no church on earth, of regular organization, that has not psalms and hymns, and every thing just described. But the simple and only proper question here is, Had the Christian church, during the first three or four centuries after Christ, *prescribed forms*, according to which she conducted her *ordinary prayers* in public worship? If she had, it has certainly remained a secret to this time. No hint to that amount, that we have ever seen, has survived in all the remains of antiquity. But so much has survived that speaks a contrary language, that we cannot think it will be difficult to satisfy every impartial reader, that, during the period in ques-

tion, extemporary prayer, or in other words, prayer conducted according to the taste and ability of each officiating minister, for the time being, was the *only* method of public prayer in use in the Christian church.

If there had been in use among the early Christians forms of prayer, in conformity with which their public devotions were conducted, prayers would, of course, have been then *read*, as they are now by all who use liturgies. But any expression indicative of any such fact has never met our eye in the records of the first four or five centuries. The phrases *ἀναγιγνωσκέτω ἑυχὰς*, or *preces legere*, or *de scripto recitare*, &c. &c. which were so common centuries afterwards, never, so far as we know, then occur. We may, therefore, legitimately infer that the thing indicated by those phrases was neither known nor practised in those times.

But more than this; the most respectable writers who undertake to give us accounts of the worship of the early Christians, make use of language which is utterly irreconcilable with the practice of reading prayers. Justin Martyr tells us, in his second *Apology*, that as soon as the sermon was ended, the congregation all *rose up*, and offered their prayers to God. *Standing* in prayer was, beyond a doubt, the usual posture at that time; certainly the invariable posture on the first day of the week, or the Christian sabbath, on which it was accounted a sin to kneel, (kneeling being chiefly, if not entirely confined to days of fasting and humiliation.) On this account it was customary for the preacher to close his sermon with an exhortation to his hearers to stand up and pray for the divine blessing. The conclusion of Origen's sermons furnish many examples of this, of which the following is a specimen: "Wherefore, standing up, let us beg help from God, that we may be blessed in Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." And again, "Wherefore, rising up, let us pray to God, that we may be made worthy of Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and dominion, forever and ever. Amen." And again, "Standing up, let us offer sacrifices to the Father, through Christ, who is the propitiation for our sins, to whom be glory and dominion, forever and ever. Amen."—*Homil. 19, in Jerem.; Homil. 2, in Cantic.; Homil. 1, in Isaiam.*

In describing the prayers thus offered up, the following account is given by some of the earliest and most respectable writers. Justin Martyr tells us, that the president or presiding minister in the worship of the congregation, prayed

(*οσὴ δυνάμει*) “with his utmost ability.”—*Apol.* 2. Origen speaks of public prayer in the same manner. “We worship,” says he, “one God, and his one Son, who is his ‘Word and Image,’ with supplications and honours, according to our ability, offering to the God of the universe prayers and praises through his only begotten Son.”—24 *Contra Celsum*, lib. viii. p. 386. And again; “But the Grecian Christians in Greek, the Romans in the Latin, and every one in his own proper language, prays to God and praises him *as he is able*.” *Ibid*, p. 402. The same writer, speaking of the different parts of prayer to which it was proper to attend, mentions first *doxology*, or adoration, and says, “He that prays must bless God (*κατὰ δυνάμειν*) according to his power or ability.”—*De Oratione*, sect. 22. And in the same work, in a preceding section (the tenth) he says, “But when we pray, let us not *battologise*, (i. e. use vain repetitions,) but *theologise*. But we *battologise* when we do not strictly observe ourselves, or the words of prayer which we express; when we utter those things which are filthy either to do, speak, or think; which are vile, worthy of reproof, and opposed to the purity of the Lord.” Why this caution at all, if they had regular prescribed liturgies?

Tertullian, speaking on the same subject, says, “We Christians pray for all the emperors, &c. looking up to heaven, with our hands stretched out, because guiltless; with our heads uncovered, because we are not ashamed; *denique, sine monitore, quia de pectore*,” i. e. “lastly, without a monitor, *because from the heart*.”—*Apol.* cap. 30. We learn also from Origen, that they were accustomed to pray with *closed eyes*, which was wholly irreconcilable with reading a liturgy. “Closing” says he “the eyes of the senses, but lifting up those of the mind.”—*Contra Celsum*, lib. 7, p. 362.

Every pastor or bishop at this time was considered as charged with the duty of conducting, according to his ability, or *taste*, the public devotions of his congregation; and hence there was great, nay, endless *diversity*, as among us, as to the *manner* in which this part of the public service was performed. Socrates Scholasticus, the ecclesiastical historian, who lived in the beginning of the fifth century, speaking of public prayer, expresses himself in the following unequivocal and strong language. “Generally, in any place whatsoever, and among all worshippers, there cannot be two found agreeing to use the same prayers.”—*Hist. lib. v. cap. 21*. Surely this

could not have been alleged if there had been public, prescribed forms in use. In nearly similar language Sozomen, the contemporary of Socrates, and who wrote the ecclesiastical history of the same period, after asserting and describing the general uniformity of the public worship of Christians at that time, remarks, notwithstanding, that "It cannot be found that the same prayers, psalms, or even the same readings, were used by all at the same time."—*Hist. lib. 7. cap. 19.* Augustine, in like manner, who was contemporary with Sozomen, speaking on the same subject, says, "There is freedom to use *different words*, provided the *same things* are mentioned in prayer."—*Epistolæ*, 121. And to show that the prayer usually offered up in his day was extemporary prayer, he speaks of some presiding clergymen "who might be found using barbarisms and solecisms in their public prayers," and cautions those to whom he wrote against being offended at such expressions, inasmuch as God does not so much regard the language employed as the state of the heart.—*De Catechiz. Rudib. cap. 9.* Chrysostom tells us that, in his judgment, it required more confidence or boldness (*παρρησια*) than Moses or Elias had, to pray as they were wont to do before the Eucharist.—*De Sacerdot. Orat. 3. 46.* But what good reason can be assigned why such confidence or boldness was necessary if they had the prayer in a book lying before them, and they had nothing to do but to read it.

The general fact, that it was left to every pastor or bishop in the first ages of the church, to conduct the public devotions of his congregation as he pleased, appears evident from a great variety and abundance of testimony. The circumstances indeed which have been already stated are sufficient themselves clearly to establish the fact. But many other testimonies might be cited to prove the same thing. A single one from Augustine will suffice. That father, having occasion to show that numbers of his brethren in the ministry had many things in their public prayers, especially in the administration of the Lord's supper, which were contrary to soundness in the faith, assigns this reason for the fact. "Many light upon prayers, says he, which are composed not only by ignorant babblers, but also by heretics; and through the simplicity of their ignorance, having no proper discernment, they make use of them, supposing them to be good."—*De Baptismo contra Donat. lib. 6. cap. 25.* How could this possibly have happened, if the church at that time had been in the use of public pre-

scribed liturgies? And the remedy which Augustine and his contemporaries suggest for this evil, is quite as decisive in its import as the evil itself. The remedy was for the weaker and more illiterate pastors to consult their more wise and learned neighbouring pastors, who might discern and point out any improprieties in prayers. This whole matter will be better understood by adverting to the fact, that as early as the age of Augustine, many men had crept into sacred office, and some had even been made bishops, who were unable even to write their own names. This appears from the records of several ecclesiastical synods or councils about this time, in which bishops, when called upon to subscribe the canons of those councils, were obliged to get others to write their names for them. The following is a specimen of some of the signatures of those councils. "I, Helius, bishop of Hadrianople, have subscribed by Myro, bishop of Rome, being myself ignorant of letters." Again, "I, Caiumus, bishop of Phœnicia, have subscribed by my colleague Dionysius, because I am ignorant of letters." These examples of illiterate ecclesiastics at once illustrate and confirm the complaint of Augustine.

No wonder that such ecclesiastics were unable to conduct the public devotions of their respective congregations in a decent manner, and therefore resorted to their more capable neighbours to patch up prayers for them; and no wonder that, with their simplicity and ignorance, they were often imposed upon by corrupt compositions.

And, by the way, even when liturgies were brought into general use and fully established, there was no uniformity even among the churches of the same state or kingdom. Every bishop, in his own diocese, adopted what prayers he pleased, and even indulged his taste for variety. This fact itself, we had almost said, is decisive that liturgies were not of apostolic origin. For if any thing of this kind had been known as transmitted from inspired, or even primitive men, it would, doubtless, have been received with universal veneration. It would have been cherished with a reverence similar to that for the inspired scriptures, and held fast with devout firmness. But no such thing appears. Instead of all this, as the practice of using forms of prayer gradually crept in as piety declined, so the circumstances attending their introduction and prevalence were precisely such as might have been expected. They were adopted by each pastor who felt the need of them, or was inclined to make use of them; and, by and by, when

prelacy came in, each bishop within his own diocese took such order in reference to the subject as his character and inclination might dictate. This would lead, of course, to almost endless diversity. Accordingly, it is a notorious fact, that when the reformation commenced in England, the established Romish church in that country had no single, uniform liturgy for the whole kingdom; but there seems to have been a different liturgy for the diocese of every bishop. And when, in the second year of king Edward's reign, the principal ecclesiastical dignitaries of the kingdom were directed to digest and report one uniform plan for the public service of the church, they collated and compared the five Romish missals of the several dioceses of Sarum, York, Hereford, Bangor and Lincoln, and out of them formed a liturgy. So that the missals in use in five popish bishoprics constituted the basis of the first liturgy of king Edward, and consequently of the book of Common Prayer, as now used in Great Britain and the United States. And this, no doubt, is the fact to which the celebrated earl of Chatham referred, when, in a debate in the British house of lords, more than half a century ago, he said that the church of England presented an aspect of a singularly motley character; that she had a *popish liturgy*, *Calvanistic articles*, and an *Arminian clergy*. It is sincerely hoped that this statement will not be considered as arising from any disposition to cast odium on the liturgy of the Protestant Episcopal church. It is, in many respects, a noble composition. We do not wonder that those who admire and love it are so numerous. Still its history ought to be known, and both the nature and design of the publication under review compel us, in justice to our argument, to make this statement. And, indeed, notwithstanding all the beauty and excellence of the English liturgy, it certainly bears, in some of its parts, very distinct traces of its origin, especially as it exists at this time in England. The alterations which it has undergone in this country have, it is true, divested it of most of its seriously objectionable features. Yet there are still passages even here which enable an accurate taste to discern something of "the tang of the old cask." On these we have no disposition to dwell. It has been the means of sincere and profitable devotion to millions; and that none may be disturbed in their edifying use of it, is our unfeigned desire. But to return to the early ages of the Christian church, which we are engaged in examining.

It was before stated, that we not only find no traces of any books, or prescribed forms of common prayer in the first three or four centuries of the Christian history; but that we do find a number of facts, incidentally stated, which are wholly inconsistent with their existence. Some of these facts have been already mentioned. Another very significant one is, that in the second, third, and fourth centuries, it was not considered as lawful, in any case, to commit to writing the prayers and the other parts of the service used in administering the Lord's supper. It was not thought proper that any other than communicants should be made acquainted with them; and in order to accomplish this object, committing them to writing, in any form, was solemnly prohibited. Basil, who flourished towards the close of the fourth century, tells us expressly, that the words which they used in blessing the elements were not written; and that what they said, both before and after the consecration, they had not from any writing. Now, when we consider that, of all the parts of the public service, as there are none more solemn, so there are none which have been more carefully regulated by prescribed forms than the Eucharist; we may confidently conclude, that if there were not, at the period referred to, and from the very nature of the case could not be any written forms for that ordinance, there were none for any other part of the public service.

We read of some of the early churches being supplied with copies of the sacred scriptures; but not a word of their being supplied with prayer books in any form. When the buildings in which the early Christians worshipped were seized, and an exact scrutiny made of their contents by their pagan persecutors, we read of copies of the Bible being found, and vessels for administering the communion, and other articles very minutely specified; but not a hint respecting forms or books of prayer. We meet with frequent instances of reading psalms, reading other portions of scripture, reading narratives of the sufferings of martyrs, reading epistles from other churches, or distinguished individuals; but not a syllable of reading prayers. Now all this is wonderful, if prayer books and reading prayers had been then as common as many of the zealous friends of liturgies assert, and would persuade us to believe. The very first document in the form of a prayer book that we have met with, is a *Libellus Officialis*, mentioned in the twenty-fifth canon of the Council of Toledo, Anno Domini 633. This, however, seems to have been rather a brief

“Directory for the worship of God,” than a complete liturgy. It was a document given to every presbyter at his ordination, to instruct him how to administer the sacraments, lest through ignorance of his duty in reference to those divine institutions, he should offend Christ. “Quando presbyteri in parochiis ordinantur, libellum officialem a suo sacerdote accipiant, ut ad ecclesias sibi deputatas instructi accedant, ne per ignorantiam etiam in ipsis divinis sacramentis Christum offendant.”

With respect to the alleged liturgies of St Mark, St James, and that of Alexander, all enlightened protestants, as we believe, agree that they are manifestly forgeries; and with regard to the liturgies attributed to Chrysostom and Basil, Bishop White, an English prelate, who lived in the reigns of James I. and Charles I., delivers the following opinion: “The liturgies,” says he, “fathered upon St Basil and St Chrysostom, have a known mother, (to wit, the late Roman church,) but there is (besides many other just exceptions) so great dissimilitude between the supposed fathers of the children, that they rather argue the dishonest dealings of their mother than serve as lawful witnesses of that which the adversary intended to prove by them.”—*Tracts against Fisher, the Jesuit*, p. 377.

The result, then, is that liturgies were unknown in the primitive church; that, as piety declined, the clergy began to need external aids for conducting the public devotions of their congregations; that this matter, however, continued for several centuries to be managed by each pastor for himself; that in the exercise of this individual discretion, frequent blunders occurred, through the gross ignorance of the clergy, and sometimes blunders of a very unhappy kind; and that liturgies did not finally obtain universal prevalence until the church had sunk into a state of darkness and corruption, which all protestants acknowledge to have been deplorable.

The only question which remains to be considered is, whether confining those who minister in holy things to prescribed liturgies in public worship, is, on the whole, expedient and useful? Having spent so much time in the preceding discussion, we shall answer this question with great brevity.

We are constrained, then, to answer it, in general, in the NEGATIVE. It is, indeed, both expedient and useful that pre-composed prayers should be repeated from memory, or recited from a book, by those who, from weakness, or want of presence of mind, need such help; that is, who cannot pray in a

connected and edifying manner without such aid. For we shall ever maintain, that it is better, far better, to read or recite a good prayer, than to utter a bad one extemporaneously. But a question worthy of very grave consideration is, whether any man who is unqualified to pray without a form, is fit to be a minister of the gospel? We think there is a life, a simplicity, and a touching and moving power in prayers poured forth from a pious and feeling heart, which cannot, ordinarily, be approached in reading written forms. We think, too, that there is so great a variety in the exigencies, sufferings, situations, hopes, and joys, of individual believers, of each particular congregation, and of the church at large, at different times, and at the same time in different places, that being *confined* to the same *precise* form of words for ages together, is by no means most conducive to the edification of the body of Christ. We cannot help believing, that the constant repetition of the same words, independent of this variety of situation and exigence, tends to produce with many, dullness, and a loss of interest. It is in our apprehension, also, no small evil, when the *gift* and the *grace* of prayer are not daily called into exercise, and thus eventually repressed. Bishop Wilkins, though a friend to the use of forms of prayer where they were needed, argues strongly against yielding ourselves entirely to such "leading strings," as he emphatically calls them, and expresses the opinion, that giving vent to the desires and affections of the heart in extempore prayer, is highly favourable to growth in grace.—*Gift of Prayer, chap. ii. p. 10, 11.* We are persuaded, further, that where religion is in a lively state in the heart of any minister, and especially when it is revived among the members of his church generally, there is a feeling of constraint on being confined to forms of prayer, which will either vent itself in extempore prayer, on particular occasions, or will lead to languor and decline under the repression.

Besides, one of the first principles of prescribed liturgies seems to be questionable. Why should men who lived three or four hundred years ago understand prayer, and be able to prescribe forms for it, better than the pious and learned divines of the present day? Why should we, of the nineteenth century, consent to bind ourselves as apprentices in prayer to men who lived at the dawn of the reformation, when we decline doing so as to *preaching*? Surely nothing but long habit could reconcile any to such principles. In consequence of

adopting such a principle, and acting upon it, the church of England is at this hour tied down to a form of prayer, over the *diction* as well as the *sentiments* of which some of her most devout sons mourn in secret. And even in the United States, persons who have no belief in the doctrine of *baptismal regeneration*, nay, who consider it as an unscriptural and pestiferous error, are yet obliged either to profess their belief in it, in solemn addresses to the Great Searcher of hearts, or to pause in the midst of elevated devotion, and refuse to adopt the sentences which evidently contain it. We are not ignorant that much is said about praying in the very language of the ancient church. In reply, we say, show us prayers found in the Bible, or formed by apostolic men, and we will venerate and adopt them; but when we are told of the duty of adopting prayers formed in the sixth, seventh, and subsequent centuries, we are just as little convinced as we should be, if told that we ought now to pray in *Latin*, because many centuries ago that language was employed in public worship by those churches whose vernacular tongue it was.

We have weighed well all the objections which the book before us, and other works in favour of liturgies, have often urged against extempore prayer, and have no hesitation in saying, that when carefully and impartially compared with the objections to liturgies, the balance is manifestly in favour of the extempore plan. It may be somewhat difficult, at first, for those who have been all their lives accustomed to forms, to unite with entire comfort in free prayer. But the difficulty, as we have had occasion to know, is soon surmounted, and, finally, almost, if not altogether vanishes. In this as in most other respects we are creatures of habit, to an extent which nothing but experience could reveal. But, in fact, if extempore prayer be made up chiefly, as it ought to be, of the thoughts and language of scripture, no pious person who loves his Bible, and is familiar with it, will have any material difficulty at all in following him who leads, and entirely uniting with him. And as to the allegation that extempore prayer is so often chargeable with improprieties both of thought and language, and is so frequently poor, jejune, and unsatisfactory, we can only say that every thing human is imperfect: that these imperfections are always most indulgently regarded by those who are most deeply pious, and who lay more stress upon thoughts than language in the worship of God; and that where there is a *tolerable* amount of piety, talents, and learning in the ministry

of any church, which it is the absolute duty of every church to maintain, the evil in question, however real, will generally be found much less than is commonly supposed. Besides, this difficulty is by no means confined to free prayer. It would be easy for us to relate a series of anecdotes respecting the use of liturgies, quite as much calculated to cover it with ridicule as any thing contained in this book, or any other book we have ever seen, is to expose to derision extemporary prayer. We could muster up, we have no doubt, quite as long and as amusing a catalogue of ludicrous improprieties as our adversaries have ever done. But on a subject so intimately connected with the feelings and rites of devotion, we forbear. We have been often assailed with such weapons; but we "will not return evil for evil." Much rather would we contribute all in our power to the comfort and edification of all our brethren in Christ, however they may differ from us in modes and forms, and however prone they may be to treat our faith or worship with reproach. There is, however, one use which we wish to make of the little sectarian missile before us, which we cannot but hope and pray may render it a blessing in disguise. *Fas est et ab hoste doceri.* Many of our ministers are by no means so attentive as they ought to be to the character of their public prayers. If they bestowed more thought on the devotions of the pulpit; if they were more careful to store their minds with appropriate scriptures for this part of their public duty; if they abounded more in devotional composition; and above all, if they laboured more in private, with their own hearts, to cultivate the spirit and the gift of prayer; we should find them performing this part of their ministerial service with more dignity, and in a more simple, scriptural, touching, and edifying manner. They would give less occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully. Nay, perhaps it would not be going too far to say, that the prayers of the sanctuary would be among the most attractive, impressive, and beneficial parts of the whole public service. If those who are invested with the sacred office, as well as those who are candidates for it, could be persuaded to direct serious attention to this matter, we might soon hope, under the divine blessing, to witness the most beneficial results.

It seems to be the impression of some pious men, that all kinds of preparation for public prayer is an unjustifiable opposing or stinting of the influence of the Holy Spirit. That this is not only an error, but a mischievous error, we are deeply

persuaded. Why preparation for bearing the desires of the people to God in prayer, should be more objectionable, or less a duty, than preparation for bearing the message of God to the people in preaching, we cannot conceive. Why diligent and devout study should be considered as unfriendly to the work of the Holy Spirit in one department of the work of the sanctuary, more than another, we find no solid reason, either in the nature of things, or in the instructions of the Bible. And in this opinion it is evident, that our venerable fathers concurred with us. The following extract from our "directory for the public worship of God," is decisive as to their views, and shall close our remarks.

"It is easy to perceive, that in all the preceding directions there is a very great compass and variety; and it is committed to the judgment and fidelity of the officiating pastor to insist chiefly on such parts, or to take in more or less of the several parts, as he shall be led to by the aspect of Providence; the particular state of the congregation in which he officiates; or the disposition and exercise of his own heart at the time. But we think it necessary to observe, that, although we do not approve, as is well known, of confining ministers to set or fixed forms of prayer for public worship; yet it is the indispensable duty of every minister, previously to his entering on his office, to prepare and qualify himself for this part of his duty, as well as for preaching. He ought, by a thorough acquaintance with the Holy Scriptures; by reading the best writers on the subject; by meditation and a life of communion with God in secret, to endeavour to acquire both the spirit and the gift of prayer. Not only so, but when he is to enter on particular acts of worship, he should endeavour to compose his spirit, and to digest his thoughts for prayer, that it may be performed with dignity and propriety, as well as to the profit of those who join in it; and that he may not disgrace that important service by mean, irregular, or extravagant effusions."
