

THE HOMILETIC REVIEW.

VOL. XIX.—APRIL, 1890.—No. 4.

REVIEW SECTION.

I.—ELEMENTS OF STRENGTH AND OF WEAKNESS IN CHURCH LITURGY.

BY T. D. WITHERSPOON, D.D., LL.D., LOUISVILLE, KY.

THREE centuries ago all the leading churches of Christendom were liturgical. Not only had the Church of England, in its oft-amended "Prayer-Book of King Edward VI.," substantially the same liturgy that is found to-day in its *Book of Common Prayer*, but the other great Protestant bodies had compilations, more or less elaborate, the use of which was obligatory upon ministers and congregations. Luther was the first to take action in this direction. Although in his recoil from the bondage of Rome he had gone so far as to adopt as his motto :

"We can fast and pray the harder
With an overflowing larder,"

it does not seem to have entered his mind that the stated services of public worship were to be held in any other way than according to set forms, carefully prepared beforehand, and duly sanctioned by proper ecclesiastical authority. As early as 1523 he published his *Lateinische Messe*, and three or four years later an edition of the same, amended, improved, and translated into the vulgar tongue. The latter soon came into use in all the churches under the influence of the Reformer, and became the basis of the liturgies used in the Lutheran churches until the present time. In 1538 Calvin issued a liturgy for the use of the Church of Strassburg, and in 1541 substantially the same for the Church of Geneva, thus laying the foundation of the established liturgies of the Reformed Churches of Europe. Next, in 1549, under Cranmer's superintendence, appeared in England the *First Prayer Book of King Edward VI.*, which, after being successively altered and restored, according as Puritan or hierarchical influence prevailed at court, finally took form, a century later, as the *Book of Common Prayer*. In 1554 John Knox drew up his *Order of Service*, closely modeled after the liturgy of Calvin,

and introduced it into the Scottish churches. In 1560 it was formally adopted by Act of General Assembly, and became the established liturgy of the Presbyterian Church.

There was wide divergence between these liturgies in many respects. Cranmer's could scarcely claim to be more than an amended edition of the Roman Missal, expurgated of its grosser errors, and translated into the language of the common people. That of Luther diverged more widely, though still following in large measure the order of the Roman Missal. The liturgies of Calvin and Knox were to a considerable extent independent compilations, had comparatively few responses, and made provision in certain parts of the service for extempore prayer. But they were all liturgies in the strict sense of the word, and it would be an interesting inquiry—though one in which the readers of *THE REVIEW* would not be likely to agree—how it came about that some of the largest representative bodies of Christendom have ceased to be liturgical, and are to-day so strenuous in their opposition to all liturgical forms of service.

Leaving this question to church historians, and writing now from the standpoint of a minister of a non-liturgical church—one consequently from which may be expected a more disinterested survey, and a more impartial estimate of the relative strength or weakness of particular forms of liturgical service—the writer desires to call attention to a few matters which seem to him worthy of consideration, and which may at least awaken inquiry and stimulate further discussion.

I. First then, it may, we think, be accepted as a maxim that the chief strength of a liturgy lies in the provision which it makes for the responsive element in worship. The old sea captain gave expression to the truth in very homely but very significant phraseology when he said that he liked the service of the Episcopal Church because "the preacher gave a fellow a chance now and then to jaw back at him." To let the people feel that they have a distinct and audible part, not only in the singing, but in all the devotional exercises of the service, is unquestionably an element of power in any church ritual. As far as public prayer is concerned, this feature of responsive service can claim for itself apostolic sanction and scriptural authority. From 1 Cor. xiv : 16 it is evident that, according to the usage of the apostolic church, there were certain points in the service at which the congregation had the privilege and duty of making response by uttering an audible *Amen*; for the Apostle gives as a reason why those who had the gift of speaking in unknown tongues should not exercise this gift in the public worship of the sanctuary, "else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks."

If any should object that the utterance of a responsive Amen is not necessarily liturgical, since our Methodist brethren who eschew liturgy

are nevertheless most vociferous in the use of the Amen, it may be replied that it is the liturgical and not the spontaneous use for which we contend as scriptural—not that each worshipper shall have the privilege at any point in the service at which his fervor moves him to break in with his unexpected and sometimes startling Amen, but that there shall be fixed points at which by preconcert the opportunity shall be afforded, and all devout worshippers shall be expected to utter a consentaneous and heartfelt Amen. Can any one doubt that if the formidable “long prayer before sermon” of the Presbyterian Church were broken up into sections, each covering one of the six topics recommended in the *Directory for Worship*, and each at its close affording an opportunity to the people to utter a devout Amen, there would be less complaint of the tediousness of this part of the service and more real participation in it? Such a response, provided for as a regular part of the service, would, of course, be liturgical, but it would seem that, to this extent at least in the direction of a liturgy, even our most ultra-non-liturgical churches might go with assurance both of highest scriptural authority and of greatest comfort and helpfulness to Christian worshippers.

When in the matter of responsive service we pass beyond the utterance of the concerted Amen at the close of supplications and thanksgiving, we reach a point where we are not only without explicit warrant from Scripture, but also without the inferior guidance of established usage in the primitive church. The effort to discover traces of liturgical forms in the Book of Acts and in the Pauline Epistles; the attempt to construe Pliny's celebrated *carmen dicere secum invicem* as referring to responsive forms of prayer, rather than to alternate singing of hymns, and the contention that the three-chapter prayer in the Bryennian manuscript of the 1st Epistle of Clement was composed for liturgic use in the church at Rome, may satisfy those who by education or taste are predisposed to liturgical forms. They will hardly meet with general acceptance. The great body of students of church history will doubtless continue to hold with the learned and conservative Mosheim (Eccl. Hist. Cent. III.; P. II., ch. iv., n. 19) that “in the earliest times, exclusive of the short introductory salutation, *Pax Vobiscum*, etc., no established forms of prayer were used in public worship, but the bishop or presbyter poured forth extempore prayers.” In that famous passage of Justin Martyr (Ap. 1: 67: 15), in which the officiating minister (*ὁ προεστώς*), is said to send up supplications and thanksgivings “according to his ability,” (*ὡς ἡ δύναμις αὐτοῦ*), while the people shout assent in the Amen, the *δύναμις* will be generally interpreted as referring to mental and spiritual ability, and not to strength of voice or lung, and so as clearly implying extempore gift in prayer.

But whatever views may be held on this point, the fact remains

indisputable that this responsive feature of church worship, which appeals so strongly to spiritual emotion, and which has its scriptural basis in the apostolic Amen, found expression at a very early period in the history of the church in various alternate as well as strictly responsive forms. Amongst the earliest of these were the *Pax Vobiscum*, to which Mosheim alludes, and the *Oratio Dominica*, recited clause by clause in concert by the congregation after the officiating minister. Then came in addition to the Amen such ejaculatory clauses as "We praise Thee," "We bless Thee," etc.; then the *Trisagion*, a brief litany with the responses, "Lord have mercy upon us," etc., the Creed, the Doxology, etc. However we may differ as to the time or the order of introduction of these forms of responsive or alternative service, and however we may disagree as to the extent of their warrant or authority, it must be admitted that the liturgies of Christendom have in large measure owed their power to the responsive element embodied in these forms, to their influence in bringing the people to feel that the service is not that of the minister alone, but of the whole congregation—that each worshipper has an appropriate and essential part to render. In the service of the Book of Common Prayer there is much that to those unaccustomed to liturgic forms seems cold and cumbersome, but the heart must be cold itself that is not moved by the "We beseech Thee to hear us, good Lord," of the Litany, and by the "Lord have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law," in the rehearsing of the Ten Commandments. These portions of the liturgy, which are truly and purely responsive, are full of power, and it is a question whether our non-liturgical churches, in breaking away from that which constitutes the weakness of liturgy, have not gone to the opposite extreme, and in failing to make provision for audible response of any kind in worship, shorn public devotion of a part at least of its strength.

II. But it is time to turn for a moment to that which constitutes the weakness of liturgy, namely, the substitution of a mere mechanical alternation of utterance for a genuine spiritual response on the part of the worshipper, by reason of which the service tends to degenerate into a piece of ecclesiastical machinery to be set in order and run through on every occasion of worship. In this substitution of mere alternation for real response lies one great objection to fixed forms of prayer. The advocates of these forms claim that in this way the public prayers become really the prayers of the congregation, giving expression to their desires and aspirations, whilst in extempore prayer only the desires and aspirations of the minister are expressed. If this be so, then the Amen at the end of the set form of prayer is not responsive, but simply alternate. If the prayer is the people's in the same sense that it is the minister's, then with equal appropriateness the congregation might utter the prayer, and the minister say

Amen. The Amen is simply alternate ; it is not responsive. But if the minister, out of the fullness of his own heart, and from his experience of his people's needs, offers in the people's behalf the prayers and thanksgivings which seem to him most appropriate for them to offer, then their Amen becomes responsive ; then it becomes full of deep spiritual significance, for it takes up the prayer which the minister, out of the fullness of his heart, has presented as the one they ought to offer, and bears it as their own and lays it at the mercy seat. Most wisely, therefore, did the reformers, Calvin and Knox, and, if we mistake not, Luther also, make provision for extempore prayer. Our ideal of a liturgy, as far as the service of prayer is concerned, would be that which provides for extempore prayer, but gives opportunity at suitable points in the prayer for the responsive Amen.

The chief element, however, in which this mechanical feature of liturgy exerts its depressing influence is in the reading of Scripture. There are few things more monotonous and chilling than the alternate reading of Scripture in many of our congregations, where the minister reads one verse and the congregation the next, without any regard to rhetoric, elocution or grammar. The exercise is purely mechanical. There is no reason why the verse read by the minister might not as well be read by the congregation, or *vice versa*. The break in the continuity of the reading is often exceedingly infelicitous. We are reminded of Mr. Spurgeon's account of the division of the New Testament into chapter and verse, which, he says, took place as the translators crossed the English Channel. Being in a chop-sea, they cut off a verse at every roll of the vessel, and when it made a great lurch the meat-axe of the translators came down and cut off a chapter.

It recalls to mind the old ironside preacher who gave out his hymns one line at a time, and who, after requiring the congregation to sing, "When Abraham's servant to procure," quite convulsed the younger part of his audience by solemnly adding, "A wife for Isaac went." If alternate reading is to be had in our churches and Sunday schools, let us by all means provide ourselves with paragraph Bibles, let us eschew the arbitrary division into verses ; let some respect be paid to punctuation marks ; let the minister or the congregation come to a semicolon at least before letting go the handle of the mechanical crank.

This substitution of alternate for responsive service is peculiarly disappointing and depressing in the reading of the Psalms and other poetical portions of Scripture, for here there is a wanton disregard of the responsive element, and its displacement by the mechanical, where the Holy Spirit has made the most perfect provision for the former. Open, for instance, the Book of Common Prayer, to the power of whose truly responsive portions we have borne willing testimony. Turn to the selection of Psalms, Take the first selection

which opens with the 19th Psalm. What a magnificent Psalm for responsive reading. By the great law of Hebrew parallelism, every verse contains an utterance for the minister and a response for the congregation, in which the thought uttered by the leader is taken up by the people and re-echoed with increasing emphasis and power. Look at it as a few verses are thus placed in their true responsive relation :

Minister. The heavens declare the glory of God ;

Congregation. And the firmament showeth His handiwork.

Min. Day unto day uttereth speech ;

Cong. Night unto night sheweth knowledge.

Min. There is no speech nor language ;

Cong. Their voice is not heard.

Min. Their line is gone out through all the earth ;

Cong. And their words to the end of the world.

Take the next Psalm, the 20th.

Min. The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble ;

Cong. The name of the God of Jacob defend thee ;

Min. Send thee help from the sanctuary ;

Cong. And strengthen thee out of Zion.

Min. Remember all thy offerings ;

Cong. And accept thy burnt sacrifice. Selah.

Here is not simply mechanical alternation, but true, spiritual, worshipful response. And yet in all the collections and selections, in all the orders of service for congregational worship, for Sabbath-school exercises and anniversaries, how completely this responsive element is ignored and the purely mechanical alternation of verse by verse substituted. Who will arise and give us a liturgy with a psalter, rhythmically translated and responsively arranged? Who will provide for us a *Magnificat* in which the minister's "My soul doth magnify the Lord," shall meet its soulful response in the people's "My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour?" He will be, we think, the coming man, and his the liturgy that will commend itself to all devout worshippers.

II.—THE RELATION OF PREACHING TO CHRISTIAN WORK AND WORSHIP.

BY PROF. T. HARWOOD PATTISON, D.D., ROCHESTER THEOL. SEM.

IF proof were needed of the continued vitality of the sermon it might be found in the continued discussions about it. Men laugh at it, sneer at it, protest against it, vow that its day has past and that its occupation is gone, but yet it lives. Stripped and wounded and half dead, it lies to be ignored by the priest and abandoned by the Levites, but it never fails to be succored by some good Samaritan who will not suffer it to perish. "Whether the special profession of the preacher will last into the next century," some one has lately written,