

THE
PRINCETON REVIEW.

APRIL, 1861.

No. II.

ARTICLE I.—*Education; Intellectual, Moral, and Physical.*
By HERBERT SPENCER, Author of "Social Statics," "The Principles of Psychology," &c. New York: D. Appleton & Company. 1861.

THIS book is a reprint of four articles first published by the author in different British Quarterlies. The first, entitled, "What knowledge is of most worth?" was published in the *Westminster Review*, nearly two years ago, and was immediately reprinted in this country, both in the *Eclectic Magazine*, and the *New York Times*, thus showing its decided power to command attention. The second, on "Intellectual Education," was first published in the *North British Review*. The third and fourth, on "Moral Education," and "Physical Education," were first published in the *British Quarterly Review*. It is only necessary to read these works to see that the author is furnished with various and affluent knowledge, is a clear and vigorous thinker, and is master of a simple and nervous style. He has already distinguished himself by works on "Social Statics," "Principles of Psychology," and "Essays: Scientific, Political, and Speculative." He is now about publishing a sort of encyclopediac survey, or what may perhaps more properly be called a fundamental and comprehensive out-

decline, handed down her dominion to the broader civilization of modern times. And that event has also received its historian from the first maturity of the succeeding epoch. Herodotus is not, in any sense, a Gibbon, but he stands to his oriental subject, as the greater modern does to the mightier empire, whose departing glories he records.

Until lately, the only antiquity which we distinctly recognized was that which lay behind the decline of Rome; we are now favoured with a somewhat more competent insight into the character, duration and proportions of that which lay behind the decline of Persia. From the later we inherit the Greek and Latin classics; from the earlier the Hebrew Scriptures. As every discovery in the antiquities of the later is turned to account in elucidation of the classical authors, so let us hope that competent hands will be found to employ the knowledge, now revived, of the earlier epoch, with similar effect upon the ancient books of revelation.

ART. V.—*The Apostolic Benediction.*

THE full form of the Apostolic Benediction is found only at the close of the second Epistle to the Corinthians: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all." In most of the Epistles it is used in an abridged form; "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all;" and in several, it is still more abridged, "Grace be with you all."

The Spirit of Christ takes up the natural and conventional usages of men, and consecrates them to his own spiritual purposes. We may observe as an instance of this, how the Christian form of greeting comes in the place of those which only expressed a natural sentiment of civility; and how it is thus made to suggest and to convey the substantial blessings of the gospel. As in parting compliments, so in introductory salutations; where common usage says "Greeting," or expresses the

courteous wish for health and peace, the Christian spirit says, "Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ."

When the Lord suddenly appeared among his disciples, he saluted them with, "Peace be unto you." He directed the disciples when they entered a house on their mission, to say, "Peace be to this house;" and to watch for the effect of their greeting, as a sign that they were welcome, or otherwise. From this they were to decide whether they had any good work to do in that house. These were intended rather as greetings, than as blessings; rather to ascertain the conditions of blessing, than to confer the blessing itself. In the apostolic writings, the form of Christian blessing appears with great decision and uniformity. It may be marked as one of the strong characteristics of apostolic Christianity. It is remarkable as to its matter and its manner. We have no record of the course by which this epistolary form of blessing passed into use in the public assemblies of Christians; but as the earliest liturgies contain it, and as the substance, and even the full form of it occurs constantly in the patristical addresses to Christian individuals and churches from the apostles down, it must have been adopted on authority of unquestionable validity. It is not improbable that the apostles used it no less in the public assembly than in epistolary correspondence; and that it passed from the apostolic age into the subsequent times as an established form of blessing, agreeable to the spirit of Christian faith and worship. Our authority for using the ceremony may be safely presumed to be apostolic, and therefore Divine. It must hence be considered as having a sacred import. It is not an empty ceremony; not a mere sign of kind wishes on the part of the leader of divine worship, for the spiritual edification of the people; but like preaching, prayer, sacred song, and the sacraments, it has a deep spiritual significancy, and when properly used, an efficacious power, through the Holy Spirit, for Christian edification. As the church regards her dependence on the grace of Christ for prosperity, and the necessity of complying with those established laws of the kingdom of grace, by which redeeming influence is dispensed, she will consider, in connection

with her other ordinances of worship, the nature, the design, and hence the proper use of the apostolic benediction.

As to its nature and design, it is undeniably and strictly a benediction. In speaking, as above, of expressions of Christian good wishes, and of social, friendly salutations at parting, or at the close of a letter, we do not thereby state any of the distinctive characteristics of this ceremony as a public usage in the church. If, as we have no ground to deny, it was used by the apostles in the Christian assemblies, it must have carried with it the significance not of a mere wish or prayer, but a form of blessing. It could not have been one of the forms of public prayer. According to our theory of worship, nothing is properly prayer in the religious assembly, as part of the public exercises, but that in which the congregation and the minister are considered as uniting, and the language of the united address is always in the first person. But in the benediction, the minister and the people stand as two parties, one addressing the other.

The pronouncing of a blessing by one religious person upon others, has prevailed wherever we discern the feeblest traces of the true religion. The patriarchs pronounced their dying blessing on their children. Melchisedek pronounced a blessing on Abraham. This was an act of official authority, the less having been blessed of the greater. The patriarchal blessing was official also, if the family be considered as a religious organization, of which the patriarch is the priest. This was the true view of the constitution of the family before the larger religious organizations were formed; and it is the true view still. The patriarchal blessing was properly a blessing, so far as it signified good to come for the children. It was partly prophetic, and partly, as with Jacob in blessing his sons, a pious effusion of wise and trustful forecast respecting the natural course of Providence with the children, according to their predominant characteristics.

When the children of Israel took a national organization as "the congregation of the Lord," and had ceremonies of religious worship multiplied among them immensely beyond those of previous ages, and of other nations, we find a form of blessing divinely composed and enjoined as a part of their ritual.

The same Divine Spirit which prompted the extemporary forms of blessing among pious individuals and families, and which dictated among many people outside of the covenant of Abraham, the use of the benediction among their means of religious culture, now incorporated among the positive and regular conditions of obtaining and cherishing gracious influence, a most beautiful and impressive ceremony as an official act of "blessing the people." The high priest was directed to say to the people, "The Lord bless thee and keep thee: The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." It is then added, to explain the import of the ceremony, and to ensure its validity, "And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them."

This Jewish form was most strictly a benediction, a blessing of the children of Israel. And it was a type of the Christian form of blessing, in this respect that it came from the same Spirit, working according to the law of grace, and producing its form according to existing conditions. And as Christians trace, in the doctrinal outlines of Moses, the rudiments of the Christian Trinity, it will be found no mere work of imagination to indicate an essential correspondence between the Jewish form of blessing and the Christian.

The name of God, to be thus put upon the people, was Jehovah, the name announced in the advanced revelations to Moses; the most comprehensively descriptive name by which the true God has ever made himself known. Corresponding to this, as there was no new name of broader import, by which to distinguish the Christian position in blessing, we have the specific personalities included under the term Jehovah, with the form of good proper to each: Love, grace, and communion. God loved the world, and gave his Son with the fulness of grace, who brings men into the communion of the Spirit; that is, into the participation of the Spirit common to them with the Father and the Son. Since the one Jehovah is now known as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, he requires this name to be put upon his people in baptism; and he would also require that those who bless his people, and his people who bless one another, should bless in this name. This is his new covenant name, the name by which

his people are ever to be distinguished, and by which he is to be known among them, in all the world and to the end of time.

We notice then the three-fold form of the Jewish benediction, and the corresponding three-fold form of the Christian; and how the several parts of the one coincide with the several parts of the other, each with each; the Holy Ghost thus testifying, though with an obscurity like that of other revelations of the time, the three-fold personality of the one true God, executing his triple office in the scheme of redemption. Thus,

1. The first contains the general invocation and declaration of Divine favour as proceeding from the infinite fountain of indiscriminate goodness, of which the people of God are the happy and distinguished partakers. "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee." The Lord bestow upon thee the blessing of his Almighty protection. From Abraham down to Moses, the idea of exposure to violence had been peculiarly associated with the covenant families. As the father of the faithful sets out from the land of his nativity to go, he knows not whither, he hears the voice of his covenant God assuring him of favour in the form which his circumstances would require. "Fear not, Abraham, I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." Among the unfriendly and barbarous clans of the country, where he and his friends were so exposed to violence and robbery, it was his only security, that the God in whom he trusted would be his defence. The Lord would stand between him and his enemies. This protection was also gloriously symbolized in the cloud which hung behind the camp of Israel in the wilderness, luminous toward the camp, but dark towards any pursuing foes. So suitable a form of Divine favour could not fail to become a leading object of desire and prayer among the people who so felt their need of protection. It must give them their leading idea of the Divine beneficence. Hence the most general expression of Divine favour to meet the pious desire of that time, would be substantially that of the first sentence of the Jewish benediction: The Lord bless thee with protection. The more general of the three parts of the Christian benediction is the second; and this corresponds with the first of the Jewish, in being comprehensive of all blessing, and in using the form which expresses the leading Christian idea of Divine favour—

the love of God. The New Testament gives Christ to the church as the manifestation of God, in whom all fulness of blessing dwells. The prominence of Christ in the New Testament and in the whole administration of the new covenant is good reason for placing his name first in the fervid and grateful conceptions of Divine favour, which prevail in the animated exercise of blessing. Hence "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" is the first part of the formula. But in the second, we have the general mention of the love of God, which describes the original, undivided idea of the Divine favour as revealed in Christ. Thus the first sentence of the Jewish form answers to the second of the Christian.

2. The second specifies the gracious source of the benefit received; the principle in the Divine nature from which protection and all other favours from God to men proceed; the aspect of love in showing favour to the ill-deserving. "The Lord be gracious unto thee." Here the Jewish benediction recognizes sin, and the grace of God which forgives sin, and renews the sinful heart. The Spirit of the covenant could not permit this glowing annunciation of Divine goodness to the chosen people to be used in the form of public and solemn benediction, without the emphatic admonition, that this goodness would avail them only in the character of unmerited favour. Now what could appear more like a New Testament version of this second clause of the Mosaic benediction, than the first clause of the apostolic—"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ?" And even the first part of this second clause of the Jewish blessing is framed in language beautifully typical of the full idea of grace as revealed in our Lord Jesus Christ. "The Lord make his face to shine on thee." The Lord Jesus was full of grace and truth; and his person is the "face" of God; "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person." It is the height of Christian blessedness on earth to have "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ;"—a beautiful example of the New Testament light and grace opening out of the Old, as the flower from the bud. In the old benediction, the grace is mentioned in the second place; in the new, it is named in the first. The gospel magnifies the grace of God towards man. "Grace and truth came by Jesus

Christ." So commanding in the gospel is this great idea of grace, that it takes the lead in all the religious thoughts of true Christians; and therefore, in a form of speech intended to express the blessings bestowed on men through the gospel, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is naturally mentioned first. We have thus in the second part of the Jewish benediction a type of the second part of the apostolic.

3. The third part of the Hebrew benediction presents even a still brighter and clearer type of the gospel blessing. "The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." Peace is the effect of grace. Grace is considered as a disposition in God, peace as an inward condition of his people. Now as God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, dwells in his people, and exercises within them his gracious disposition, he reveals himself in the office of the Comforter. While the grace of God is considered objectively, the Lord Jesus Christ fills the whole field of the believer's vision; because it is in Christ that the fulness of this grace is personified. A step in advance transforms the object into subject, the grace seen into grace felt. Contemplation passes into experience. The view of Christ as person now becomes sense of Christ as power. For, since the power of Christ is the Holy Ghost, the sense of Christ as a comforting power in us, proves the living communication between God and the soul to be established and complete; and so the office of mediation has been magnified. Now the Comforter has come; and the condition of his coming is the receding of the Mediator. "If I go not away the Comforter will not come to you; but if I go away I will send him unto you." Till then the mediation itself is not fully seen. For it is not till the Comforter fulfils his office in the soul, that the purport of Christ in his mediation is truly shown. "He shall testify of me; for he shall take of mine and shall show it unto you." And this he does by becoming, according to his name, the peace [the comfort] of Christ in the soul. The peace is not a consequence of the showing; it is the showing itself. The consciousness of peace is the only eye of the soul that can read this testimony of the Spirit concerning Christ. "Not as the world giveth," says the Saviour, "give I unto you." The world gives peace through thought; and thought in order to peace. Christ often gives

peace in order to thought; for then can we think most truly of Christ when we feel his peace. This precious part of the Hebrew benediction, interpreted thus by the New Testament, cannot have been placed after the other by accident; since we know that the omniscient Spirit of peace, who knew the true relation of the thoughts to one another, in the gospel order, must have governed the order of expression by the same rational law by which he governed it afterwards in the apostle. It intentionally shows an advance of the thought from the grace of God, to the effect of that grace in us. Precisely this is the order and import of the closing member of the apostolic benediction—"The communion of the Holy Ghost." The grace appeared in its fulness in Christ; but that fulness of grace consisted in the measureless gift of the Holy Spirit, which was upon him. God gave not the Spirit by measure unto him. That Spirit wrought in him not only more mightily than in Moses or David, but also after a different sort. It wrought Moses in the mould of a servant; Jesus in that of a son. In those who are united to Christ by the new covenant Spirit, it tends to produce the feeling of sonship. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of sonship in them, and tends or strives always to manifest himself as such, in their experience and conduct. He is the Spirit of adoption in this sense. It is because he is sent forth into our hearts, that we can call God our Father, as Christ did, and with an instinctive and confiding discernment of the meaning of the term. The possession of this common Spirit is the communion of the Holy Ghost. The love of God, appearing in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, is thus "perfected in us." The Spirit of peace in Christ becomes the Spirit of peace in us. "My peace I give unto you." The indwelling of the Holy Ghost is enjoyed by Christians, in fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, and with one another. "Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit." This unspeakable gift the Saviour promised. "I will not leave you comfortless." He breathed this same assuring word, though less articulately, upon his people, through the last part of the Mosaic benediction; "The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee and give thee peace." In other and gospel words; The

Spirit take of Christ's, and show it unto thee, in giving thee peace. And the peace which thus comes to the people of Christ, is the peace of God which passeth all understanding; the true result of the presence of the Holy Spirit of peace in the soul. The fellowship, the common possession of the Holy Ghost, be with you all.

This correspondence of the several parts of the Jewish benediction with those of the Christian, is not imaginary nor incidental. It is from the one unchangeable Spirit of the two covenants. Under both the people were taught to look for the same blessing of the Lord upon them. It is the same Holy Spirit in both, working to the same beneficent purpose under different forms; speaking the same things in diverse language. In both he speaks and acts through an appointed ministry. The spirit and life of Christianity was in Judaism, partly active and partly latent. It spoke and acted rather through precept than doctrine, requiring rather particular acts under authority and direction, than a self-guided obedience under light.

Here then is a beautiful, emphatic, and inspired form for blessing those who profess to love the Lord in sincerity, and who endeavour to worship him in spirit and in truth. It was commended to the church by apostolic example; and continues to be used as a part of the exercises for edification in the public assembly. Its use in the church is warranted by ample authority, even if authority were needed to commend it, besides its fitness. The Holy Spirit plainly offers his gracious operation in connection with the use of this ceremony. If we consider the nature of the means of grace, and how they become effectual for Christian edification, we shall see this brief but solemn and significant ceremony to be, in its peculiar way, one of the most edifying among them all.

The means of grace consist partly of religious exercises enjoined by the Lord upon his disciples, with the promise of his blessing; partly of exercises suggested by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of Christians, and found conducive to edification; and partly such as arise from the course of Divine Providence with men. "The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communiceth to us the benefits of redemption," are all held by the church as occasions of edifying and saving intercourse

between God and his people in this world. We will briefly explain the operation of our appointed and customary forms of public worship.

It is true of all these ordinances, as our Catechism declares of the sacraments, that they "become effectual means of salvation, not by any virtue in them, or in him that doth administer them, but only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of his Spirit in them that by faith receive them." We are certainly right in not ascribing spiritual efficacy to the outward form of any religious rite, or to any thing natural or solely official in the administration. The external ceremony in itself is nothing. "In Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but a new creature." Indeed, no branch of the church considers outward ordinances efficacious, without the blessing of Christ and the operation of the Holy Spirit. Christians differ in their ways of explaining the connection between the outward form and the inward power, but all agree in ascribing the efficiency of ordinances entirely to the working of the Spirit of God. We must not attempt to magnify the value of the Christian benediction, or of any other form of worship, solely as an outward form; but carefully inquiring into the reasons of our faith in the efficacious working of the Spirit, we strive to secure the proper use of this as well as of the other ordinances of the gospel.

In describing the nature and explaining the effect of the means of grace, we must refer to the living union between Christ and those who use his ordinances with profit. None can have either the beginning or increase of the grace of Christ, except through vital union with him. Then by the habitual submission of the mind to his revelations of himself, and by endeavours after new obedience in all things, we favour the work of his Spirit upon us. A well-trained faith, free and familiar intercourse with outward ordinances, delight in recognizing the presence of the Lord, observing the tokens of his gracious power, and grateful confidence in its good effects upon us, are the established conditions of a rapid growth towards the perfection of the spiritual man. Under these conditions the voice of Christ is always heard in his ordinances, and his power is felt. Without a participation with Christ in his Spirit of

life, there can be no effectual use of ordinances. The water of life wells up in the church to those who observe the ordinances of Christ in faith; but for those who have no faith, the well is deep, they have nothing to draw with, and remain athirst.

Our Lord said to his disciples concerning his own words, that they were spirit and life. His words came direct and alive from the measureless gift of the Spirit within him. The whole visible person of Christ was peculiarly a product of the Holy Spirit. He was the pure, full, and proper embodiment of the power, wisdom, truth, and love of God, in human form. His personal being as the Son of God is from an eternal motion of the Divine nature, making him as Son, eternal like the Father. In him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead; and that invisible fulness had its true image in his visible manhood. In his vital connection with all the powers of the world, he has but to will, and the thing he wills is done. Thus by his silent will, he causes the water, as he walks upon it, to bear up his body, and a celestial splendor to invest his earthly form on the mount of transfiguration. And when his will was expressed in words, the words bore the same relation to the Spirit of life within him that the miracles did. While he spoke as never man spoke, his words were felt by such of his hearers as were disposed to receive them with candor, and not to resist them through prejudice. The Spirit of Christ was silently abroad among the people where Christ was present. His presence was widely felt even where no signs of his personal activity appeared. It draws the multitude to John the Baptist; moves Andrew to look for Jesus; causes the infirm woman to press through the crowd that she might touch the hem of his garment; blind Bartimæus to cry unto him by the way-side; Zaccheus to climb the tree to obtain a sight of him. Such evidences of his influence upon the people around him, without words, show the spirit and life in the midst of which his words were spoken. The common laws of human influence were in full force in him, but Divine powers were working under them. They explain the motions of his grace in the hearts of those whom he addressed in words. They account for the impressions felt and acknowledged by those who heard his doctrine, and the strange submission with which they always obeyed his

commands. John the Baptist, at his mild suggestion, yields all modest and humble scruples, and baptizes him. James and John, Simon and Andrew, leave their occupation and their home at his word, to attend upon him. Matthew leaves the receipt of custom, to follow him. The centurion goes his way, expecting to find his servant alive and well. The worldly traffickers in the temple withdraw at his bidding. While he was teaching and doing his mighty works, his disciples were receiving the impression, which flesh and blood did not make upon them, but only the Father in heaven—the conviction that he was the Christ, the Son of the living God.

The Scripture theory of Christianity presents Christ as the universal medium through which all the works of God are done; and the Holy Spirit as the agent by which the motions of this universal medium are produced and propagated. “To us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him, and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.” Christ is all in all. His Spirit does, under his direction, and according to his good pleasure, all his works of power, wisdom, and love, in creation, providence, and redemption. Of him, and through him, and to him are all things; and as the Holy Ghost, who is the same in all, diversifies his operations and his gifts in the church, agreeably to the will of Christ, so he carries on his diverse works in all the departments of life, according to the laws imposed by the Mediator. In Christ all the works of the Spirit are done. In this mediatorial element, thus pervaded by the powerful agency of the Holy Spirit, all men live; and all are affected by it, according to their diverse susceptibilities; and these are determined, according to the sovereign will of God, by the laws of the covenant under which the individuals live, and by the course of Divine Providence with them.

There must be a susceptibility not belonging to the natural man. The people heard the words of Christ with gladness, because they had somewhat in them congenial to him. “My sheep hear my voice, and they follow me.” The sheep, in this case, have the nature of the Shepherd. His Spirit is in them. They can feel his influence because they have a kindred life. His influence is not so much *upon* the heart as *within* it. It

is the motion of his own Spirit dwelling in the soul. The day dawns, and the day-star arises in the heart. The sun of the firmament enlightens according to distance. The Sun of Righteousness enlightens according to faith. The susceptibility of the soul for the influence of Christ is its faith. This faith comes by the law of the covenant; and the development of the faith depends on the course of providence. "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" becomes the law of the believer's life. The words of Christ, therefore, as they *express* the Spirit of life in him, *impress* the Spirit of life in them. Now, the ordinances of Christ are of the nature of his words. They are effectual for edification to those who have his Spirit and life. "To him that hath shall be given." The way is prepared in them for the effectual use of Divine ordinances. It may be said of his ordinances, as of his words, "they are spirit, and they are life." We mean by ordinances of Christ, not outward ceremonies in themselves; but the doing of what he has appointed, and what he approves, in obedience to him, and with the expectation of his blessing. In such acts, the conscience of obedient intent is the testimony of the Spirit within us. The spirit and life of Christ's ordinances are then testified in the hearts of those who worthily and profitably observe them. They have concurrent motions of the omnipresent Spirit, and therefore know the voice of Christ in all his institutions.

Even when the Spirit of Christ speaks through the lips of unworthy men, and of men unconscious of his presence and of his influence with them, the same Spirit in the hearers may recognize itself in the things that are spoken, and present the concurrent impression. A profane person may read the Scriptures in the religious assembly with spiritual effect; and may be the instrument of edification to the children of God, by delivering thoughts, and representing affections, which are not the thoughts and affections of his own mind. Accordingly, we teach, against the Romanists, that the efficacy, or the practical validity of an ordinance, does not depend on the intention of him who administers it. The words and the acts in an ordinance of Christ may be effectual through faith in the hearers and partakers, even without faith in the administrator. Still, it must

•

be remembered that an ordinance administered by a sincere person, with the lively exercises of the spiritual mind, will be far more edifying to the same believing and earnest participant, than if administered by an infidel. The inestimable law of spiritual sympathy, at the foundation of the fellowship of saints, secures this important advantage to the church; and this is even independent of the import of the words. The words and acts of Christ were spirit and life to many of his hearers, who knew little or nothing of his meaning for their understanding, and who only obtained, through what they saw and heard, a glimpse of his manly dignity and love. The case of Martha at the grave of Lazarus is a beautiful example. The Lord's conversation with her about his being the resurrection and the life, and his saying that those who believed in him should never die, were all an enigma to her uninitiated thoughts; but they conveyed to her the growing assurance that he was the true Messiah, and the Saviour. "Believest thou *this*" [that I have just said]? "Yea, Lord," she answers, "I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, that should come into the world." So, also, those who pray "in the Spirit," have often devout motions immediately caused by the Holy Ghost, who intercedeth within them, according to the will of God; while the things thus prayed for are not expressed in words, nor conceived in thought by the suppliant. These most profound and silent risings of undefined and indefinable desire, these "groanings not uttered," are assuredly the most effectual of the prayers of the church; and that, undoubtedly, because they are offered more purely, *κατὰ θεόν*, divinely, Rom. viii. 27, and partake less of the infirmities of our earthly humanity. They are not dimmed and distorted in the mirror of our opaque and shattered intellect. They are not, like many desires in our habitual prayers, first given to our own conceptions in ill-fitting language, and uttered, with circumstantial excitement, in thoughts and words that recur as in the cycles of an automaton. Words which are spirit and life are not signs, but forces. Such were the Saviour's words; such are his ordinances. "His word was with power." "The word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of the soul and

spirit, of the joints and of the marrow; and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." The words and the ordinances of Christ, when used "in the Spirit," as in the case of availing prayer, operate, through that Spirit, as occasions of Divine motion in the soul. Christ and his covenant people are one, by virtue of the one Holy Spirit in him and them; and the use of his ordinances, as spiritual exercise, originates with him, while the action is proper to them; and the Spirit, who prompts the obedient exercise, takes occasion, from the exercise, to diffuse his own healthful forces more copiously through the man, in body and in soul; to bring forth more of the power of righteousness into the happy experience, and the dutiful practice of conscious life, and more fully to secure the continued abiding of the soul in Christ. It is thus that the ordinances of Christ accomplish, with those who are in covenant with him, the thing whereunto they are appointed.

Our Christian institutions fail sadly in their efficacy, when the people so misunderstand them as not to expect uniform and rapid progress in religion from their proper use. If the office of the ordinary means of grace, and the manner of their operation be such as has been above described, we cannot expect the full blessing of Christ through them, and the working of his Spirit in us by their instrumentality, without a practical faith in their uniform efficacy under the appointed condition. "Therefore, I say unto you, whatsoever things ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." Of all practical matters for the people of God, the most important is, that they have full and abiding faith in the blessing of God, through the ordinances of the church. The absence of this faith renders the means of grace a nullity. When people so mistake the efficacy of their ordinances as to measure it by the degree of outward excitement they experience or observe, and not by the quiet and steady growth of faith in things unseen, and of the comfort of hope, and the work of love in themselves and their children, they have departed from the true path of spiritual edification; and no means which they can substitute, will be found to have in the end, the desired effect. Our most common ordinances, those of most ordinary and familiar use, are intended to be effectual instruments of

the power of God, as the hand is the instrument of our mind. Our observance of them must be viewed as occasions of his real and effectual working. Without such a faith, the mind is in a state of resistance against God, who is working through his ordinances in us; and no arbitrary, special measures of our own, can make that resistance any less. Let the children of the church but grow up in the bosom of a genuine and lively faith in the ceaseless and uniform operation of God through his ordinances in the church, and we should see a very different religious character in the children and the youth of our land, from that which we have now to deplore.

With the views now stated, we are prepared to show how the apostolic benediction should be understood in the church, and in what spirit it should be pronounced and received.

And first, by no means should it be regarded as a mere form of dismissing the assembly. That it comes last in the order of time in the public service, is not determined by anything in the sentiment it expresses, or in the effect to be expected from it. It is used to promote the work of the Holy Spirit within us. The Jewish benediction was not given as a form for dismissing the assembly. We know not that in the public ceremonies of the congregation it was used at the close at all. It was a form of public blessing, appointed as a part of Divine service. It is so employed in the Christian church. The liturgies of the Greek, Roman, and English service, place the apostolic benediction at the close of the order for public prayer; thus signifying that the prevailing Christian idea of the ceremony was not connected with the dismissal of the congregation. It was rather understood as a solemn and emphatic form of pronouncing a blessing in the name of the Lord upon the people.

Neither, in the second place, should it be regarded as a prayer. Not but that it might be proper, in itself, that a short, sententious prayer should be used as the last exercise of the congregation, before dispersion; and if such had been recognized as the import of this ceremony through the course of its history, and especially in the Scriptures, or if the higher Christian sentiment of our assemblies tended towards regarding it as a prayer, there might be no sufficient reason for insisting on the opposite view. The Jewish high-priest was commanded

to bless the people in the name of the Lord; and this was to be one of the ways of putting the name of the Lord upon the people, and also one of the ways of imparting his blessing to them. This was not a sacerdotal function, inappropriate to the Christian ministry; but like any other service, properly ministerial, as in the sacraments for instance, it was fulfilling an office which conveyed a blessing to the faithful. The Christian benediction is not a prayer addressed to God, by minister and people united; it is not a prayer by the minister in behalf of the people. We never witness any form of its use which answers to the idea of prayer; but on the contrary, in that mixed style of expression which comes nearest to the style of prayer: "*May* the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with *us* all;" the address is never to God, but to the people; and it thus amounts to an expression of the minister's kind, and Christian wish, to the people of whom he counts himself one. For the most part, however, the form which is used shows that the minister does not think himself offering a prayer, or even expressing a wish of his own; and that he would not have the people think so; though neither he nor they would appear to consider it an authoritative and effectual act of blessing, as it really is.

The Christian benediction, we next remark, should be regarded as an act of solemn worship. It was a most reverential ceremony for the Jewish high-priest, when he officially pronounced the blessing of Jehovah in his name, upon the people, and for the people, when they stood to receive that blessing. No solemnity of the Jewish ritual could exceed that of publicly blessing and being blessed in the name of the Lord. No profounder reverence for God could be felt or expressed than that of the ancient patriarch, when he commended his children and friends to him, and with glowing confidence in his holy and faithful covenant, pronounced his blessing on them. And when can a Christian minister, or a Christian assembly ever have a frame of more intense and worshipful devotion, than while pronouncing and receiving the blessing of the Lord? Wherever in the course of public worship it may occur, it is one of the most solemn and expressive parts of our reverential service, and may be one of the most acceptable and useful.

And, we add, it should therefore be numbered among the more important and effectual of our means of grace. That it has always been considered edifying for religious people, on solemn occasions, to bless each other in the name of the Lord, is evident from the general practice of the pious from the earliest times. When king David had been awakened to lively devotion by some marked event, he returned to bless his household; and this record describes a part, at least, of those domestic exercises by which the pious monarch sought the spiritual welfare of his household. Would something like this be out of place in the families of the Christian church? The apostles certainly employed it as a means of engaging and strengthening the pious affections of their Christian friends; and their example commends it to the use of the pious in every age for the same purpose. In the public assembly, especially, should it hold an important place, as a means of grace. The Spirit, undoubtedly, would have it so. He suggests it to his people, in every age, as one of the social exercises which may be "good to the use of edifying." It was an eminent means of grace to the Hebrews. When the priest blessed the people in the name of the Lord, the Lord blessed them. "They shall put my name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them." When the congregation, by a public and united act of reception, took thus upon themselves the name of the Lord, and solemnly owned him as their God, he took them into closer union with himself, by the quickened working of his Spirit within them. When a Christian congregation observes the ordinance of baptism, in relation to one of their members, they express a public recognition of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as their God, and receive, through the sacrament, not only for the member baptized, but for all the faithful present, a quickened spiritual operation, which they would not otherwise enjoy. The same is true of the observance of our other sacrament; and all other exercises of pious faith, not distinctly sacramental, contribute, according to their measure, to the same end of spiritual edification, and in the same way. And certainly, not one of the least of the non-sacramental means of enlivening the spiritual operation in the heart of the church, may be the devout use of the Christian benediction.

We mention, also, as a special part of the import of this ceremony, connected with the one last mentioned, that it publicly and impressively recognizes the dependence of the church on the grace of God through Christ. The blessing pronounced by Melchizedek on Abraham implied, in both the parties, a declaration that all human works depend for success on the blessing of God. No Christian could have witnessed the Jewish ceremony of blessing, without understanding it to signify a lively sense of dependence on the Divine favour. When the high-priest blessed the people, and the people stood to receive the blessing, how solemn was their united acknowledgment of dependence, and their profession of reliance on God for prosperity in all their ways! And the apostles, in their parting salutations, felt, and wished their Christian friends to feel, that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ was the only security for their welfare. As used in our assemblies, the Christian benediction is one of the happiest and most significant forms of confessing our own insufficiency for either duty or enjoyment, and of looking, with the trustful glance of a moment, to Him in whom is all our strength. This awakening impulse upon our Christian sentiment of dependence and of reliance on the grace of God, is certainly not inappropriate to a parting moment; and therefore, to the close of our public service. It is even a more emphatic and impressive sign of our united desire and expectation of the grace of God than the language of the public prayer. The benediction supposes the assembly to take the position, not of suppliants, but of humble and grateful recipients; looking with all assurance for the grace previously sought in prayer, and recognizing the appointed ceremony as an instrument by which the grace is conveyed. And in this view, the exercise acquires some peculiar solemnity, when, as in our assemblies, it occurs only at the close of service, and the moment before dispersion; and when the posture of the congregation expresses unanimity and animation, and is taken for the purpose of receiving the blessing.

This ceremony, moreover, as hinted already, is useful as an act of formal and thankful acceptance of the grace of God, sought and presented in the ordinances of public worship. The Divine favour conveyed through all the ordinances of the occa-

sion; may be thus solemnly recognized and devoutly accepted by a separate and significant rite. When the congregation stood to receive the blessing of Aaron, they presupposed the gracious promises in which they hoped, and felt, for the time just past and then passing, a kind of consummation of their fulfilment. This was one of the ideas implied in their form of blessing. The promise of blessing seemed just then transformed into blessing itself in the very act. Such an act of acceptance has somewhat quite peculiar, as an exercise of faith. It is believing that we have the favour. It is what it purports to be—the receiving of the blessing. The pious among the Jewish people recognized the Lord, indeed, habitually, as their God; they received his promise as true and faithful; they looked for its continuous fulfilment in the devout use of all the ordinances of their law; but their act of faith in receiving the blessing, in obedience to his own appointment, seemed a comprehensive and crowning act, a committing of themselves to his blessing, and a testimony of their assurance that his gracious presence is actually with them, and will abide with them to the end.

It should be added, that the repetition of this blessing, by the Divine command, has the nature also of the renewal of a pledge on the part of God himself. It must have had great force in assuring a believing and intelligent Israelite of the kind interest of God in him. For he knew that Aaron pronounced only words which were appointed by express statute to be used “for ever throughout their generations.” The voice of the priest was the voice of the law. Every repetition was like a new pledge of its perpetual efficacy. In the time of the apostles the people had the important doctrine of the Holy Spirit. They knew that the apostles spoke by the Spirit; and that their words of blessing were like the words of Christ. When an inspired apostle said, The grace of the Lord be with you, it was to them like Christ saying, “Peace be unto you.” As the Lord had said, “I will not leave you comfortless,” they could now recognize him, speaking by his Spirit in the apostles, and actually giving them the promised peace according to their faith. The perpetual use of this benediction in the church, is

like the perpetual announcement of the Saviour's actual blessing in pursuance of his promise.

We therefore have yet to remark, that to all hearts complying with the conditions on which ordinances become efficacious, the benediction conveys the grace it signifies. The manner of this conveyance and in what it consists, we have explained as far as we could, in our remarks above on the efficacy of ordinances in general. The blessing is effectual to those who receive it in faith. If any object and raise questions respecting this statement, we have no reply, but to repeat the statement. We cannot reason about it. It can be received only by faith; and this faith is never the offspring of argument. The blessing is efficacious only to faith, and it is faith only that receives the fact of its efficacy. All objections and queries against this fact show incapacity to realize the fact. To the mind that harbors them the blessing signified cannot come. We admit the benediction in our churches to be mournfully ineffectual. But this is nothing against its uniform and precious effect under the due conditions. All our ordinances are deplorably unprofitable to great numbers of our people. But under the appointed conditions, they are uniformly attended with a blessing. Let our dear Christian people consider this matter in the scriptural light. Who of us ever doubts that Abraham was effectually blessed by the blessing of Melchizedek? Who of us, standing in the presence, and under the lifted hands of the Lord Jesus to receive his benediction, would not feel himself blessed indeed? What parent among us in covenant with God would not have rejoiced to see the hands of Jesus laid on his little child, and hear him pronounce his blessing on it? Would he not think the blessing spoken to be a blessing given? And who of us would not feel himself blessed, in hearing pronounced upon him a distinct and emphatic benediction of the apostle Paul? Let our people realize that there is a blessing in the apostolic benediction. Every ordinance of the house of the Lord becomes effectual unto salvation, "by the blessing of Christ and the working of the Spirit in them that by faith receive them." The benediction is an ordinance of Christ. The servants of the Lord have the same authority for blessing his people as for instructing them. The blessing

is pronounced in his name. Its very words were dictated by his Spirit, to be his standing form for blessing his people. The church recognizes its solemn import, in concurrence with her Lord, by requiring it to be publicly pronounced only by those who are duly clothed with ministerial authority. The words used are not the words of man. It is the Lord's blessing, pronounced on his people as his own signal for actually blessing them. And shall it be made of no effect? When Christ, by his appointed ministry, pronounces his blessing, in the forms of his new covenant, upon his people in those public congregations which are convened in his name, and where he is in the midst of them, is it not one of the due occasions for the quickened working of his purifying and peace-giving Spirit, in the whole body? Does not the New Testament suggest this as the law of spiritual operation? Are we not to consider the laws of the Spirit's operation uniform? Where the requisite faith is, and where the circumstances in all cases are the same, are not the means of grace to be regarded as always equally efficacious? God maketh men to differ, indeed, and that most strictly according to the counsel of his own will. But are we therefore to presume, that he does this independent of all conditions of his working, and so as to indicate no law of dispensing his gifts? The whole church believes that her ordinances are efficacious according to a revealed law. And our ardent longing is to make this conviction appear as the very best and most powerful action of that faith by which we are justified, and by which we receive Christ as he is offered in the gospel. Let us believe that when Christ our Lord pronounces his blessing upon us, we are truly and effectually blessed.

It follows from all that has been said above, that the apostolic benediction, as used in our public worship, is an exercise of some peculiar solemnity. The Christian sentiment in the church should be trained to hold it in very high esteem and reverence. The Holy Ghost has given it to us, and we have received it as among the ordinances of the Lord; and why should it be considered less solemn and important than the corresponding ceremony was among the ancient people, or the ceremony of blessing used by the apostles? Abraham evidently held the blessing of Melchizedek in high and most devout

estimation; and the apostle's way of speaking of it invests that mysterious transaction with great spiritual validity. Patriarchal blessings were highly prized by the members of religious families, according as they had been faithfully instructed in the fear of God. Esau could hardly endure the actual forfeiture of his father's dying benediction, though, in a freak of impiety, he had despised his title, and bartered it away. The Israelites unquestionably ascribed to the blessing of the Lord, pronounced in his name by their high-priest, a peculiar and sacred value, in proportion as they cherished a solemn regard for any of their religious ordinances. There could not have been, in the view of the disciples, a more solemn act of our Lord in all his ministry, than that of laying his hands on the little children and blessing them as heirs of the kingdom of heaven, or that of lifting up his hands and blessing them at the ascension. And as the solemnity of blessing was eminent among the gracious acts of our Lord and his apostles, so may the solemnity of our Christian benediction, which is taken from the apostles, be eminent among our ordinances of Divine service.

With these views of the nature, the design, and the proper efficacy of our form of blessing, we are prepared to offer a few thoughts on the manner and the spirit in which the benediction should be used by minister and people. We should be happy to succeed in drawing the attention of our ministers and people to this subject throughout the church. Though some may, at first thought, incline to consider it a matter of inferior importance, yet if the foregoing views are just, they are of serious importance to the spiritual interests of the whole church. The part of our religious exercises of which we are speaking, affords a striking instance of imperfection in our way of conducting religious exercises; for there is probably no other part of our public worship which we perform so unworthily as this. In the present imperfection of the church, the efficacy of our ordinances must of course be imperfectly realized; but on several accounts the benediction is liable to peculiar abuse. It will require earnest and patient attention to the subject, to effect the desired improvement in this part of the public conduct of our congregations; and it will require also great improvement in other respects, in order to secure

this; and particularly in respect to the views of the people as to the nature and efficacy of Divine ordinances in general. But serious attention being once drawn to this will very naturally extend to all the forms of Divine service of which this is a part. And it will still farther aid in redeeming the benediction from misuse, if we can secure due attention to the following suggestions, respecting the manner and spirit in which minister and people should employ it.

And first, of the Minister.—He should consider himself as pronouncing a blessing on the people by the authority of Christ. The whole work of the ministry is to be done indeed by the authority of Christ; and the servant of God should recognize his dignity as an ambassador of Christ, and a representative of his authority in all his official work. But in preaching and prayer, in which the imperfect human faculties have so prominent an activity, it seems often to the self-distrustful minister, too much like an approach toward presumption, to allow the vivid and confident feeling of Divine authority in all that he says and does. It might rather suit the humble and unassuming spirit, to think of the authority as an apology for the acts, than as a ground of their claim to reverence and submission. And in those of bolder faith, who habitually recognize the full Divine authority of their official functions, the consciousness of a large mixture of human imperfection, especially where great prominence is required for intellectual agency, abates very much from the full and hearty feeling of Divine authority in particular ministerial functions. But in pronouncing the blessing there need be no such bar. And according to the view we have taken, the whole propriety and fitness of the ministerial act depends on its being done most strictly and consciously in the name, and by the authority of Christ. It should seem like saying to the people, *By the authority of Christ, I bless you.*

The words of blessing should also be spoken under a sense of the presence of Christ. The minister should perceive the presence of Christ through faith, at least as clearly as the presence of the congregation through sight. For this is one of the fundamental operations of faith in Christ unseen, which gives his disciples command of spiritual powers. “He that

believeth in me, the works that I do he shall do also." A simple, habitual recognition of the presence of Christ, is one of the most important forms of that piety in a minister, which qualifies him for the suitable performance of all his official duties. It gives his words great sway over those susceptible of gospel influence. In preaching, in prayer, in conversation, in all official acts, his influence will be felt the more, the more he feels the influence of Christ. And no official act of a minister with this spiritual qualification, would seem to carry more of "the blessing of Christ" to his people, than that in which he is consciously and devoutly engaged in pronouncing a Christian blessing upon them. Let his own heart be firmly and peacefully settled in the conviction of the Lord's presence with himself and the congregation, while he pronounces the words. It is perhaps a common failing of our ministry, that the sense of the Lord's presence, according to his promise to his servants, fades into a very dim apprehension of some delegated power committed to them, to exercise the ministerial office with his approbation, and the promise of his aid. We speak this only from much comfortless experience in the matter. We do not imply any indiscriminate censure on the ministry in general; but supposing this experience of ours to arise from a common infirmity of human nature, we venture to judge others so far by ourselves, as to make it the occasion of offering a brotherly admonition. It is not enough that we perform the office now referred to as a matter of ceremonial common-place. But in the nature of the exercise, there are some reasons for special pains to secure that mental frame in which a lively sense of the presence of Christ shall be a prominent element. The assembly is convened professedly in the name of Christ. The believing members humbly claim his promise to be in the midst of them. They plead it in their prayer. And it would assuredly be a peculiar violence against the propriety of this part of the public service, if the minister should perform it without due recognition of the presence of Christ, in those scenes where he has so specially promised to be.

In pronouncing the benediction, the minister is permitted to regard himself as an instrument of imparting the blessing of Christ to his people. This is an important idea connected

with the ceremony, and it would, if borne in mind at the moment, increase the interest and effect of the service on the part of the minister. The idea agrees entirely with the scriptural view of the office of the gospel ministry. It involves nothing belonging exclusively to the Jewish ministry, as a priesthood. The peculiar function of the Jewish priesthood, which could not be carried over into the Christian church, was a propitiatory function. It consisted, not in acting as a medium of communicating good from God to his people, but in presenting offerings as means of propitiating Divine favour in behalf of the people. The duty of the Jewish priest in giving the people Divine knowledge, in guiding their religious conduct, in offering comfort in their sorrows, in doing for them and among them in public and in private, whatever would most promote their obedience to the Divine laws, and make those laws the greatest blessings to the people—all such duty belongs equally to the Christian minister. When he blesses a believing people, as when he teaches them, he imparts a gift. It is his own privilege to feel this. And when he does thus feel that the present Saviour is making him the instrument of communicating a blessing to his people, the blessing will be the greater. It is one of the peculiar pleasures of ministerial service to have this impression lively and deep. While not unfavourable to the purest humility, it makes one feel the sacredness and the dignity of his office, and his responsibility to his Lord for faithful service to his people. It especially qualifies for the effectual execution of this particular service. And it is a state of mind most congenial to the heart of a minister in all his pious exercises, and adapted to promote his fitness and readiness for every good word and work. And furthermore, when the minister recognizes the Lord actually blessing his own people through this established part of solemn worship, his own feeling of earnestness and solemnity will impress and benefit the people. Let him adopt this idea of his own effective instrumentality in communicating spiritual gifts to the Christian assembly, through a ministry which receives a part of its efficacy from the qualities of his own mind and heart. There is danger that the idea of the ministry degenerate into that of a mere labourer in a natural field. The Scripture admonition that

“Paul may plant, and Apollos water, but God giveth the increase,” may seem to look that way. And without some careful thought on the subject, a minister may come to think carelessly of himself, as one who merely plants the seed, and weeds and stirs the ground, and repairs the hedge, while the warming sun, the moistening clouds, and the nourishing soil do all the real work of vegetation. Thus the minister would be employed not as an agent himself, but only as applying a sort of force to agents, in which the living powers concerned in the work are conceived to reside. He is thus only like the labourer who does in the field what might be done by the power of the horse or of steam. He is only like the musician who turns a crank; or the photographer, who adjusts his chemical agents under sunlight. But “ye are the light of the world.” This thought of a Divine, efficient vitality in the agent, is liable to disappear. We must remember that this is a living agency. The work of the labourer in the spiritual vineyard consists largely of the action of his own spiritual life; and he is considered as promoting and propagating life, by exercising life himself, and that of the same kind which he would promote. It is life acting on life. The Holy Spirit, by whose working the ordinances are made effectual to believers, makes them the more effectual, other things being equal, the more mightily he works in those who administer them; and the words of blessing spoken under the full persuasion of imparting a blessing, will carry a personal power like that of the words of truth spoken under the living conviction of the truth. The minister should recognize himself as an instrument of the Holy Spirit, to increase, by pronouncing the Christian benediction, the gift of spiritual peace in the hearts of the people.

He should also pronounce the benediction as a part of the word of God. The church has taken the words of this ceremony from the apostles; much as she has the words of the form of baptism, and of the Lord’s supper from Christ. There is great propriety in using Scripture language in all such cases where the idea to be expressed is precisely the same with that of Scripture, and is as fully expressed to all minds in the language of Scripture as it could be in any other. As to the particular words, we need not insist, in a dogmatical way, that

no other words should be used than those which occur in the forms preserved in the apostolic writings. Yet since the full form we have considered is found to have prevailed in the church with so extensive unanimity and such unbroken succession, we are amply justified in presuming that such prevalence and preservation of the usage is of the Holy Spirit himself in the church; and we cannot now conceive any true Christian principle which, under any possible circumstances, would require the church to depart from the form referred to, or which would permit such departure, as by a dictate of the Holy Spirit. While we express no conscientious disapprobation of variety in the scriptural terms employed in the benediction, and would not insist that any Divine injunction was violated even by the entire disuse of what is currently understood as the apostolic form, we doubt not it will seem to the great body of the Christian people of every land, both pertinent and forcible to ask, What truly religious motive can urge to any deviation? What words can more fitly express the Christian form of Divine favour for which the church is looking habitually, and by her living instinct, to her Head? What Christian ideas are more suitable to the purposes of public benediction than those presented in connection with the names, the persons, and the appropriate redeeming offices of the holy and ever blessed Trinity? The language is so direct, so comprehensive, so concise, that no variation can possibly be an improvement. It is the only form that either good taste, or refined Christian sentiment would endure in uniform and exclusive use. And a very brief attention to this consideration will strengthen and confirm a tendency in the mind of our ministry, to adhere, in the formula of blessing, not only to some selection of scriptural terms, but to the particular form prepared to hand by the apostle, so obviously prominent in the preference of the church in all ages, and so well adapted to all the ends ever contemplated in the observance of the rite. There will be found this advantage in uniformity; that the minister, when rising to pronounce the blessing, instead of being occupied with extemporaneous intellectual motion to select a form, or even to compose one, may feel himself supplied with choicest language, and yield himself in full to the rich and sweet inspiration of the words, as words

of the Lord's blessing to his people. It is therefore with such a special meaning, that we recommend to the minister to pronounce the benediction as the word of God. Above all, if there is any part of public religious service, in which the slightest intention or appearance of eccentricity, and the use of any unusual form which might strike and distract as a novelty, should be avoided, it is this—that these words of Divine blessing may be so used as to acquire a peculiar sacredness in the minds of the people and to become the more useful on that account, is certain; and for that reason, with others, they should be fully appreciated by the minister.

He should pronounce the benediction, with the living warmth of devout emotion, in an audible voice, and with emphatic solemnity. We know how little can be done in this way under prescription; and also, if rules should be given and followed, how far short they must fall of the desired end. Books on politeness, for example, do little of themselves to produce graceful manners; and yet that they constitute an ingredient of the social atmosphere in which the true cultivation of personal grace advances in a community, is altogether probable. The mental texture, and the physical also, which would exactly qualify for the most effectual use of our personal endowments in the public worship of God, may present points of great uniformity in all persons, while the manifestations and the effects may be various. There is great delicacy in suggesting anything more, on a subject like this, than what may relate to the views of the exercise and the general spirit required for its best effect; leaving all that pertains to the manner, to flow by the natural laws "out of the abundance of the heart." But some of the defects in our practice respecting this service are so great, that to treat them with such delicacy would seem affectation. We do not say that the words are ever pronounced with marked irreverence; and yet we have witnessed the ceremony, when the voice of the speaker was scarcely heard in the centre of the house, and when it would not have been heard even if the congregation had been still. Not unfrequently is a part or the whole of the blessing pronounced while many of the people are rising, and while no sign appears, that a large part of the assembly is attending at all to what is said or done.

Sometimes the speaker begins to pronounce the words before the congregation have begun to rise. In large congregations the blessing is frequently pronounced in so low, so hurried and inexpressive a manner, that, so far from commanding the solemn respect of the great body of the people, it hardly secures the attention of those most predisposed to receive it with reverence. We need not say that in such cases the service is wholly without effect. When the assembly has to rise to receive the blessing, surely the least the minister can owe to an ordinance of Divine worship, and to the people, is to give full opportunity for assuming the posture, and becoming fully prepared to hear with reverential silence and attention, the very first words of the ceremony. It would be better that a moment of silence should intervene before the commencement, than to begin to speak before silence is made. The need of this caution is relieved when the proper posture for receiving the blessing has been taken in singing the doxology, or in prayer, and where kneeling is the posture in public prayer, and the blessing is pronounced at the close of the prayer, the kneeling posture in receiving the blessing is both convenient and appropriate. In all cases, the words of benediction should be pronounced in that distinct and emphatic manner which proceeds from the consciousness of acting in a matter of solemn import, and which will make the mere word and act of a moment the means of good impression to an attentive, devout, and susceptible assembly. Even the small matter of gesture is not unworthy of notice. The spreading and uplifting of the hands, or some motion approaching this full gesture, is practised so universally, that we can hardly hesitate to ascribe it to a universal tendency in imitation of Christ, and under the influence of the Spirit. It seems in this respect, like that reverential posture in prayer which all people tend to adopt, unless interfered with by some incidental influence connected with their history or circumstances. Whatever be the origin of the usage, or its significance, it seems more properly to respect the speaker himself, than the people; on the natural presumption that the eyes of the devout portion of the congregation, as in the exercise of prayer, will not be on the speaker. Sometimes the hands of the speaker were laid on the persons addressed. Jacob laid

his hands on the heads of the sons of Joseph. The Saviour laid his hand on the little children in his act of blessing them. It gave great animation and solemnity to the scene. Christian persons in leaving their dying blessing with the young who are dear to them, frequently do the same. With the apostles the imposition of hands was a signal for imparting miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit, and in the ceremony of setting apart persons to the work of the gospel ministry, it was a form of consecration, and a sign of conferring authority, and may have been also with the apostles a sign of conferring special personal endowments of the Spirit for the ministerial work. The imposition of hands in blessing, undoubtedly rises from somewhat felt by the speaker in his relation to the persons addressed. The lifting up of the hands, in blessing a company or an assembly, would seem to rise from the same source, and to be intended as the nearest convenient equivalent to actual imposition. The Saviour, at the ascension, lifted up his hands and blessed his disciples. The fact that this gesture has always prevailed so generally in the church, and that apparently without design, is a sufficient recommendation of its fitness, and indicates the possibility of making it contribute, by its union with the proper mental state of the minister, to the good effect of the service. Standing thus with a congregation of the Lord's people before him, lifting up his hands towards them, with the delightful consciousness of his authority to pronounce the blessing of the Saviour upon them, he cannot fail to pronounce the benediction impressively, and to secure the sympathetic concurrence of a devout assembly in a ceremony adapted and appointed to be a blessing indeed.

Secondly, of the People.—The duty of the people in their share of this interesting office would seem almost too plain to be made a matter of didactic statement. We must become as little children, in order to enter into the kingdom of God; and there is no ordinance for imparting or receiving any of the benefits of that kingdom which depends for its efficacy more than this on the childlike spirit in the recipient. Think of Jacob asking and receiving the blessing of his father; of the disciples receiving the blessing of their Lord; and we can understand somewhat of the spirit in which the apostolic benediction

should be received. The main features of the spirit are common, of course, to minister and people. He must receive the kingdom of God as a little child; and he will realize this, while he humbly regards himself as an unworthy partaker with them in the blessing dispensed through his ministry. He is blessed in giving a blessing; and on the same condition as the people. His own heart of childlike faith receives its full portion of the heavenly gift. In his official exercise he differs from the people. He has an activity which does not belong to them; but is still one with them as a passive recipient.

The people as well as the minister should recognize the presence of Christ in the benediction. In this they are even more liable to fail than he. The service is so short, that no time is given for collecting wandering thoughts; and the preparation must consist in a habit. At the close of service, too, the people are easily distracted by the very thought of departure; even if not occupied, as too often they may be, with preparation to go. A caution here is therefore needed. The ceremony cannot profit them without active faith at the time. Though the same is true of all ordinances, it is specially important in this case, because the service itself tends so little to assist any endeavour of a struggling faith to realize the presence of the Lord. They should recognize the presence of Christ so vividly, that the blessing will seem to be sanctioned and increased by his personal indorsement. There is a special and precious significance for us in the presence of Christ in such a service. In the Lord's supper, it is a needful qualification of the worthy partaker, that he should be able to discern the Lord's body. Is it not equally important to the full efficacy of our form of blessing, that the people should discern the gracious presence of Christ in the act of blessing them? Let the people diligently cultivate the habit of thus recognizing the Lord as present, to bless them, whenever his blessing is pronounced; consider him present, to do in them what is expressed in words to the outward ear.

When the people stand up to hear the appointed benediction pronounced upon them, let it be not to hear a declaration merely of what may be done, but to receive the blessing itself which the words denote; not a promise, but a deed of blessing.

They should expect to receive some new impulse of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ within them. Let them have so clear and decided an apprehension of things spiritual and eternal, that they will have an awakened sense of the peace and joy of their faith. Their faith in this blessing must be like the faith of effectual prayer. "Believe that ye receive it." Faith feels the bestowment of the blessing. The believing soul is conscious of its own peace. We dwell in the wholesome element of heaven, if indeed we are in Christ, and we feel the strengthening pulsations of reviving health. The member of the flock knows the voice of the true Shepherd. He discerns his kind, restoring influence. "He restoreth my soul; he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake." Do not expect the Saviour only to be present with you in his own appointed ordinances; but let the ordinance itself be to your faith, as his healing hand in soothing contact with your broken heart. "Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more, but ye see me; because I live, ye shall also live." All such words have a progressive application to the Christian. They are an immovable ground of hope; they offer the inspiration of hope, and they show the way for that hope, even in the present, to realize its progressive fulfilment.

In receiving the blessing, the people should consider that they are receiving not only the benefit of this separate ordinance, but also a collective benefit of the other ordinances enjoyed on that occasion of public worship. The services of the sanctuary are properly one service, composed of several parts, all contributing to the same end; all lying, like so many open ways, convergent, from the broad region of thought and contemplation, towards the great centre of security, of repose, and of perfect satisfaction in Christ. Where the apostolic benediction comes after the appointed form of prayer, as in the liturgies of several Christian communions, it may come to the heart of lively faith like the voice of gracious answer to the believing and penitent supplications just presented. In congregations where it occurs at the close of all the exercises, the Christian people may find it the act of Christ in applying, in bringing home to their hearts, as by a finishing deed, the blessing of all the ordinances of worship observed on that occasion.

The forms of our worship are means through which the Lord communicates his merciful influence to our hearts, and brings forth its fruits within us. And when we have been engaged, through the services of the hour, in praise, in humble and believing prayer, in preaching and hearing the Divine word, seeking in all these exercises the grace of God that bringeth salvation, how appropriate and significant, that we are permitted statedly to hear the Divine voice of benediction, in words of direct assurance and condescending love; "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all!" It comes with somewhat of the force of a sealing and applying act of God. Having applied to the source of sanctification and comfort in the acts of worship, with the desire to receive some gracious token, what better word could we hear, than this blessing actually pronounced upon us, in the name and by the authority of Him from whom all blessings come?

We cannot omit to notice the interest which this ceremony has for the children of the church. Believing parents, who felt an interest in Christ themselves, were the persons who brought their children to Christ to receive his blessing. They were the persons whose children he took in his arms, laying his hands on them and blessing them, and saying concerning them, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." As these children were growing up, the parents, if they retained their interest in Christ for themselves, would not fall away from their desire that their children should continue to receive the blessing of Christ, whenever it was communicated to themselves. The children, therefore, during infancy, would be considered as standing with the parents in the covenant, having the promise which the parents had, and receiving the blessing which the parents received. As a part of the nurture and admonition of the Lord, in which the children are brought up, the exercises of public worship will be offered them as early as they can attend upon them with any profit; and they can profit by being present in the solemn exercises of worship much earlier than they can understand the particular meaning of what is said and done; for right training in this respect will prepare them to sympathize in the parent's reverential emotions and join in his

reverential acts, as they do in all other things. But, besides all that is merely sympathetic and imitative, the covenant child has a gracious susceptibility of solemn impression from all such commanding suggestions of God, as are given in an assembly of devout worshippers. When he begins to understand the import of particular services, then the special utility of the benediction to him will appear. The parent who endeavours, by private instruction, to inculcate on his children the sentiments set forth in the public exercises they attend upon, will find those connected with the benediction among the earliest and the easiest he can employ. The children can take a lively interest in the ceremony by standing with the rest, and, while thus engaged for the moment, they may receive a valuable impression through the simple and unuttered faith which the Holy Spirit may work in their hearts. There is thus no part of our public worship, not even the sacred song, in which they can receive a deeper or more profitable impression. It is short, and does not tax and exhaust their attention. It is an awakening address for children, who delight to inquire into the meaning of what they see and hear on public occasions. It is easily explained to them as to what it signifies and why it is used. Its import, when explained, is simple and intelligible to children, engaging their thoughts, and awakening their lively emotions. They should be so instructed at home, that they will feel a special interest in receiving the blessing of the Lord among his people. It may be thus a stepping-stone for early faith towards a clear and well-balanced understanding of all the ordinances of Divine service, and thus contribute to their permanent edification in the knowledge and worship of Christ. Here we have the great advantage of the simple earnestness of childhood, before the worldly habits and propensities have come up to confirm the resistance against the Holy Spirit; and parents are encouraged, nay, they are required to believe, that in all early, trustful, and hopeful endeavours for the blessing of Christ on those dear ones whom they bring to him, they shall be seconded, and mightily supported by his Spirit, in their own hearts and in the hearts of their children. They have no such positive promise in relation to any others whom they may benefit by gospel ordinances, as they have in

relation to their children. And, in addition to all this, our Lord expressly teaches that this simple, earnest, submissive disposition of the little child, is a chief qualification for receiving the gracious influence—the characteristic which all must possess, in order to enter the kingdom of God.

In the above remarks on the apostolic benediction, we trust the reader will see that the nature of the ceremony, as a part of the stated forms of our public worship, has been fairly and justly represented. We think it will be considered by all readers, worthy of the intelligence and piety of the church, to secure the greatest benefit that is offered to us in this part of Divine service, and to guard against all negligent and empty formality, to which the familiar use of this brief, but impressive exercise may be liable. Like all other means of grace, this part of our worship should be used in faith; and, when accompanied by that special exercise of faith which is appropriate to the mind of the Spirit, as expressed in the service, it will convey its appropriate blessing. A large part of our remarks on the benediction, apply equally to our other ordinances; and the whole will not, therefore, be found disproportioned to the importance of the subject. We have this pleasing alternative for our hope of good, from what we have here presented to the reader: if it raise this short and simple ceremony, in the estimation of the churches, to equal rank with our other ordinary forms of worship, we shall greatly increase its usefulness by this means; if the others are still to be held in superior esteem, our remarks may be applied the more to them, as an argument from the less to the greater.