

CT 191

THE BEAUTIES
OF
THE PRAYER-BOOK.

PART II.



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them, and therefore celebrates the service with much of the ancient pomp ; while the other furiously rejects this so-called idolatry, and makes the service as bare and as simple as possible. Both parties can claim parts of the Communion Office as upholding their special views, for the English service has passed through much of tinkering from High and Low, and retains the marks of the alterations that have been made by each.

To those outside the Church this office has particular attraction, as being, in a special manner, a link between the past and the present, and being full of traces of the ancient religion of the world, that catholic sun-worship of which Christianity is a modernised revival. From the Nicene Creed, in which Jesus is described as "God of God, *Light of Light*, very God of very God, Begotten not made, Being of one substance with the Father, By Whom all things were made"—from this point we breathe the full atmosphere of the elder world, and find ourselves engaged in the worship of that Light of Light, who, being the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature, has for ages and ages been adored as incarnate in Mithra, in Christna, in Osiris, in Christ. We give thanks for "the redemption of the world by the death and passion of 'the Sun-Saviour, who suffered on the Cross for us,' who lay in darkness and in the shadow of death;" we praise Him who fills heaven and earth with His glory, and who rose as "the Paschal Lamb," and has "taken away the sin of the world," bearing away in the sign of the Lamb the darkness and dreariness of the winter; we remember the Holy Ghost, the fresh spring wind, who, "as it had been a mighty wind," came to bring us "out of darkness" into "the clear light" of the sun; then we see the priest, with his face turned to the sun-rising, take the bread and wine, the symbols of the God, and bless them for the food of men, these sym-

bols being changed into the very substance of the deity, for are they not, in very truth, of him alone? "How naturally does the eternal work of the sun, daily renewed, express itself in such lines as

'Into bread his heat is turned,
Into generous wine his light.'

And imagining the sun as a person, the change to 'flesh' and 'blood' becomes inevitable; while the fact that the solar forces are actually changed into food, without forfeiting their solar character, finds expression in the doctrines of transubstantiation and the real presence." ('Keys of the Creeds,' page 91.) After this union with the Deity, by partaking of his very self, we praise once more the "Lamb of God that takest away the sins of the world," and is "most high in the glory of God the Father." The resemblance is made the nearer in the churches where much of ceremony is found (although noticeable in all, since that resemblance is stereotyped in the formulas themselves; but in the more elaborate performances the old rites are more clearly apparent) in the tonsured head of the priest, in the suns often embroidered on vestment and on altar-cloth, in the rays that surround the sacred monogram on the vessels, in the cross imprinted on the bread, and marking each utensil, in the lighted candles, in the grape-vine chiselled on the chalice—in all these, and in many another symbol, we read the whole story of the Sun-god, written in hieroglyphics as easily decipherable by the initiated as is the testimony of the rocks by the geologist.

But passing by this antiquarian side of the Office, we will examine it as a service suitable for the use of educated and thoughtful people at the present time. The Rubric which precedes the Office is one of those unfortunate rules which are obsolete as regards their practice, and yet which—from their preservation—appear to simple-minded parsons to be intended to be enforced, whereby the said parsons fall into the

clutches of the law, and suffer grievously. "An open and notorious evil-liver" must not be permitted to come to the Lord's Table, and this expression seems to be explained in the Exhortation in the Office, wherein we read: "if any of you be a blasphemer of God, an hinderer or slanderer of His word, an adulterer, or be in malice, or envy, or in any other grievous crime, repent you of your sins, or else come not to that holy Table; lest, after the taking of that holy Sacrament, the devil enter into you, as he entered into Judas, and fill you full of all iniquities, and bring you to destruction both of body and soul." In a late case, the Sacrament was refused to one who disbelieved in the devil and who slandered God's word, on those very grounds, and it would seem to be an act of Christian charity so to deny it; for surely to say that part of God's word is "contrary to religion and decency" must be to slander it, if words have any meaning, and people who do not believe in the devil ought hardly to be sharers in a rite after which the devil will enter into them with such melancholy consequences. It would seem more consistent either to alter the formulas or else to carry them out; true, one clergyman wrote that the responsibility lay with the unworthy recipient who "did nothing else but increase" his "damnation," but it is scarcely a pleasing notion that the clergyman should stand inviting people to the Lord's table and, coolly handing to one of those who accept, the body of Christ, say, "The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life," when he means—in the delicate language used by the above-mentioned clergyman—"The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ damn thy body and soul unto everlasting death." No one but a clergyman could dream of so offensive a proceeding, and, to those who believe, one so terribly awful.

The Ten Commandments which stand in the fore-

front of the service are very much out of place as regards some of them, to say nothing of the want of truthfulness in the assertion, that "God spake these words," &c. In the second we are forbidden to make any graven image, or any likeness of any thing, a command which would destroy all art, and which no member of the congregation can have the smallest notion of obeying. The Jews, who made the cherubim over the ark, upon which God sat, are popularly supposed not to have disobeyed this command, because the cherubim were not the likeness of anything in heaven, earth, or water: they were, like unicorns, creatures undiscovered and undiscoverable. Yet in direct opposition to this command, Solomon made brazen oxen to support his sea of brass (1 Kings vii. 25, 29), and lions on the steps of his ivory throne (1 Kings x. 19, 20); and God himself is said to have ordered Moses to make a Brazen Serpent. God is described, in this same Commandment, as "a jealous God"—which is decidedly immoral and unpleasant—who visits "the sins of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;" the *justice* of this is so obvious that no comment on it is necessary. The fourth Commandment is another which no one dreams of attending to; in the first place, we do not keep the seventh day at all, and in the second, our man-servant, our maid-servant, and our cattle do all manner of work on the day we keep as the Sabbath. Further, who in the present day believes that "in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day;" geology, astronomy, ethnology have taught us otherwise, and, among those who repeat the response to this commandment in a London church, not one could probably be found who believes it to be true. The fifth Commandment is equally out of place, for dutiful children do not live any longer

than undutiful. The remainder touch simple moral duties, enforced by all creeds alike, and are noticeable for their omissions and not for their commissions: the insertion of the Buddhist Commandment against intoxication, for instance, would be an improvement, although such a commandment is naturally not to be found in the case of so gross and sensual a people as the ancient Jews. The alternative prayers for the Queen, which follow next, are only worth noting, because the first enshrines the doctrine of divine right, which is long since dead and buried, except in church; and the other says "that the hearts of Kings are in thy rule and governance," and suggests the thought that, if this be so, it is better to be out of that "rule and governance," the effects on the hearts of Kings not having been specially attractive. The Nicene Creed comes next, and is open to the objections before made against the Apostles' Creed; the last clauses relating to the Holy Ghost are historically interesting, since the "and the Son" forms the *Filioque* which severed Eastern from Western Christendom;* "Who with the Father and the Son together" ought to be "worshipped and glorified," would be more true to fact than "is," since the Holy Ghost is sadly ignored by modern Christendom, and has a very small share of either

* A short, but very graphic account of the shameful transaction by which the *Filioque* clause was, so to speak, smuggled into the Nicene Creed, is to be found in the first ten or twelve pages of the shilling pamphlet written by Edmund S. Ffoulkes, B.D., entitled "The Church's Creed, or the Crown's Creed," published by J. T. Hayes, Lyall-place, Eaton-square, London. The following short prayer, "Mentes nostras, quæsumus, Domine, Paráclitus, qui à te procedit, illuminet: et inducat in omnem, sicut tuus promisit Filius, veritatem" (*vide* Præparatio ad Missam, in the "Missale Romanum"), clearly proves, too, that the Church of Rome once held that the Holy Ghost only proceeded from the Father, as the Dominus in it can only refer to the Father.

prayers or hymns: yet he is the husband of the Virgin Mary, and the Father of Jesus Christ; he is, therefore, a very important, though puzzling, person in the Godhead, being the Father of him from whom he himself proceeds: this is a mystery, and can only be understood by faith. The texts that follow are remarkable for their ingenious selection: "Who goeth a warfare," &c. (1 Cor. ix. 7); "If we have sown," &c. (1 Cor. ix. 9); "Do ye not know," &c. (1 Cor. ix. 13); "He that soweth little" (2 Cor. ix. 6); "Let him that is taught" (Gal. vi. 6). The pervading selfishness of motive is also worth noting: Give now in order that ye may get hereafter; "Never turn thy face from any poor man, *and then the face of the Lord shall not be turned away from thee*;" "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord: *and look, what he layeth out, it shall be paid him again*;" "If thou hast much, give plenteously; if thou hast little, do thy diligence gladly to give of that little; *for so gathered thou thyself a good reward in the day of necessity.*"* No free, glad giving here; no willing, joyful aid to a poorer brother, because he needs what I can give; no ready offer of the cup of cold water, simply because the thirsty is there and wants the refreshment; ever the hateful whisper comes: "thou shall in no wise lose thy reward." These time-serving offerings are then presented to God by being placed "upon the holy Table," and we then get another prayer for Queen, Christian Kings, authorities, Bishops and people in general, concluding with thanks for the dead, not a cheerful subject to bless God for, if there chance to be present any mourner whose heart is sore with the loss of

* As if the clergy, with very few exceptions, are not sufficiently provided for by the tithes, &c., without having to go a-begging like either Buddhist or Roman Catholic monks, to both of whom P.P. and P.M. are not inappropriately applied (Professors of Poverty and Practisers of Mendicancy).

a beloved one. At this point the service is supposed to end, when no celebration of the Holy Communion is intended, and here we find two Exhortations, or notices of celebration, from the first of which we have already quoted:* in the second, we cannot help remarking the undignified position in which God is placed; it is a "grievous and unkind thing" not to come to a rich feast when invited thereto, wherefore we are to fear lest by withdrawing ourselves from this holy Supper, we "provoke God's indignation against" us. "Consider with yourselves how great injury ye do unto God:" what a very curious expression. Is God thus at the mercy of man? Surely, then, of all living Beings the lot of God must be the saddest, if his happiness and his glory are in the hands of each man and woman; the greater his knowledge the greater the misery, and as his knowledge is perfect, and the vast majority of human kind know and care nothing about him, his wretchedness must be complete. All things being ready, the clergyman begins by another Exhortation, of somewhat threatening character: "So is the danger great if we receive the same unworthily. For then we are guilty of the Body and Blood of Christ our Saviour; we eat and drink our own damnation, not considering the Lord's Body; we kindle God's wrath against us; we provoke him to plague us with divers diseases, and sundry kinds of death." (Surely we cannot be plagued with more than one kind of death at once, and we can't die sundry times, even after the Communion.) One almost wonders why anyone accepts this very threatening invitation, even though

* It is, however, only just to say that that portion of it contained between "*The Way and Means thereto,*" and "*Offences at God's Hands,*" is one of the best bits in the whole Prayer-Book, and which far surpasses the generality of sermons one hears afterwards.

there are advantages promised to "meet partakers." The High Church party have indeed the right to talk much of the real presence, since ordinary bread and wine have none of these fearful penalties attached to the eating and drinking, and some curious change must have taken place in them before all these terrible consequences can ensue. What would happen if some consecrated bread and wine chanced to be left by mistake, and a stray comer into the vestry eat it unknowingly? One thinks of Anne Askew, who, told that a mouse eating a crumb fallen from the Host would infallibly be damned, replied, "Alack, poor mouse!" Then follows a Confession of the most cringing kind, fit only for the lips of some coward suppliant crouching at the feet of an Eastern monarch; it is marvellous that free English men and women can frame their lips into phrases of such utter abasement, even to a God; manliness in religion is sorely needed, unless, indeed, God be something smaller than man, and be pleased with a degradation painful to human eyes. The prayer of consecration is the central point of the ordinance; of old they prayed for the descent of the Holy Ghost on the elements, "for whatsoever the Holy Ghost toucheth is sanctified and clean"—it is not explained how the Holy Ghost, being omnipresent, manages to avoid touching everything—and now the priest asks that in receiving the bread and wine we "may be partakers of" Christ's Body and Blood, and repeats the words, "This is my Body," "This is my Blood," laying his hand alternately over the bread and the wine; now if this means anything, if it is not mere mockery, it means that after the consecration the bread and wine are other than they were before; if it does not mean this, the whole prayer is simply a farce, a piece of acting scarcely decent under the circumstances. But flesh and blood! Putting aside the extreme repulsiveness of the idea, the coarseness of the act, the utter unpleasantness of eating flesh

and drinking blood, all of which has become non-disgusting by habit and fashion, and the distastefulness of which can scarcely be realised by any believer—putting aside all this, is there any change in the bread and wine? Examine it; analyse it; test it in any and every fashion; still it answers back to the questioner, “bread and wine.” Are our senses deceived? Then try a hundred different persons; all cannot be deceived alike. Unless every result of experience is untrustworthy, we have here to do with bread and wine, and with nothing more. “But faith is needed.” Ah yes! There is the secret: no flesh and blood without faith; no miracle without credulity. Miracle-working priests are only successful among credulously-disposed people; miracles can only be received by those who think it less likely that Nature should speak falsely than that man should deceive; those who believe in this change through consecration cannot be touched by argument; they have closed their eyes that they may not see, their ears that they may not hear; no knowledge can reach them, for they have shut the gateways whereby it could enter, they are literally dead in their superstition, buried beneath the stone of their faith. The reception of the Body and Blood of Christ being over, the people having knelt to eat and drink, as is only right when eating and drinking Christ (John vi. 57), the Lord’s Prayer is said for the second time, a prayer and thanksgiving follows, confined to “we and all thy whole Church,” for the spirit is the same as that of the prayer of Christ, “I pray not for the world, but for them whom thou hast given me” (John xvii. 9), and then the service winds up with the *Gloria in Excelsis* and the Benediction. Such is the “bounden duty and service” offered by the Church to God, the service of which the central act must be either a farce or a falsehood, and therefore insulting to the God to whom it is offered. Regarded as a service to God,

the whole Communion Office is objectionable in the highest degree ; regarded as an antiquarian survival, it is very interesting and instructive ; it is surely time that it should be put in its right place, and that its true origin should be recognised. The day is gone by for these barbarous, though poetic, ceremonials ; the "flesh and blood," which was a bold figure for the heat and light of the sun, becomes coarse when joined in thought to a human being ; ceremonies that fitted the childhood of the world are out of place in its manhood, as the play that is graceful in the child would be despicable in the man ; these rites are the baby-clothes of the world, and cannot be stretched to fit the stalwart limbs of its maturer age, cannot add grace to its form, or dignity to its graver walk.

THE BAPTISMAL OFFICES.

For all purposes of criticism the Offices for "Public Baptism of Infants, to be used in the Church," for "Private Baptism of Children in houses," and "Baptism to such as are of riper years, and able to answer for themselves," may be treated as one and the same, the leading idea of each service being identical ; this idea is put forward clearly and distinctly in the preface to the Office : "Dearly beloved, forasmuch as all men are conceived and born in sin ; and that our Saviour Christ saith, None can enter into the kingdom of God, except he be regenerate and born anew of water and of the Holy Ghost ; I beseech you to call upon God the Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ, that of his bounteous mercy he will grant to this Child that thing which by nature he cannot have." According to the doctrine of the Church, then, baptism is absolutely necessary to salvation : "*None can enter . . . except he be . . . born*

anew of water ;" thus peals out the doom of condemnation on the whole human race, save that fragment of it which is sprinkled from the Christian font ; there is no evasion possible here ; no exception made in favour of heathen peoples ; no mercy allowed to those who have no opportunity of baptism ; none can enter save through "the laver of regeneration." Can any words be too strong whereby to denounce a doctrine so shameful, an injustice so glaring ? A child is born into the world ; it is no fault of his that he is conceived in sin ; it is no fault of his that he is born in sin ; his consent was not asked before he was ushered into the world ; no offer was made to him which he could reject of this terrible gift of a condemned life ; flung is he, without his knowledge, without his will, into a world lying under the curse of God, a child of wrath, and heir of damnation. "By nature he *cannot* have." Then why should God be wrath with him because he hath not ? The whole arrangement is of God's own making. He fore-ordained the birth ; he gave the life ; the helpless, unconscious infant lies there, the work of his own hands ; good or bad, he is responsible for it ; heir of love or of wrath, he has made it what it is ; as wholly is it his doing as the unconscious vessel is the doing of the potter ; as reasonably may God be angry with the child as the potter swear at the clay he has clumsily moulded : if the vessel be bad, blame the potter ; if the creature be bad, blame the Creator. The congregation pray that God "of his bounteous mercy," "for thine infinite mercies," will save the child, "that he, being delivered from thy wrath," may be blessed. It is no question of mercy we have to do with here ; it is a question of simple justice, and nothing more ; if God, for his own "good pleasure," or in the pursuance of the designs of his infinite wisdom, has placed this unfortunate child in so terrible a position, he is bound by every tie of justice, by every sacred claim

of right, to deliver the blameless victim, and to place him where he shall have a fair chance of well-being. "It is certain by God's Word," says the Rubric, "that children *which are baptized*, dying before they commit actual sin, are undoubtedly saved." And those which are not baptized? The Holy Roman Church sends these into a cheerful place called Limbo, and the baby-souls wander about in chill twilight, cursed with immortality, shut out for ever from the joys of Paradise. Many readers will remember Lowell's pathetic poem on this subject, and the ghastly baptism; they will also know into what devious paths of argumentative indecency that Church has wandered in deciding upon the fate of unbaptized infants;—how, when mothers have died in childbirth, the yet unborn children have been baptized to save them from the terrible doom pronounced upon them by their Father in heaven, even before they saw the light;—how it has been said that in cases where mother and child cannot both be saved the mother should be sacrificed that the child may not die unbaptized. Into the details of these arguments we cannot enter; they are only fit for orthodox Christians, in whose pages they may read them who list. Truly, the Lord is a jealous God, visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children, since unborn children are condemned for the untimely death of their mother, and unbaptized infants for the carelessness of their parents or nurses. Of course the majority of English clergymen believe nothing of this kind; but then why do they read a service which implies it? Why do they use words in a non-natural sense? Why do they put off their honesty when they put on their surplices? And why will the laity not give utterance to their thoughts on these and all such objectionable parts of the Service? In the Office for Adults, as regards the necessity of the Sacrament, the words come in: "where it may be had;" but the phrase reads

as though it had been written in the margin by some kindly soul, and had from thence crept into the text, for it is in direct opposition to the whole argument of the address wherein it occurs, and to the rest of the office, as also to the other two offices for infants. The stress laid upon right baptism, *i.e.*, baptism with water, accompanied by the "name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," appears specially in the office to follow the private baptism of a child, should the child live; for the Rubric directs that if there be any doubt of the use of the water and the formula, "which are essential parts of Baptism," the priest shall perform the baptismal ceremony, saying, "If thou art not already baptized, I baptize thee," &c. Surely such care and pains to ensure correct baptism speak with sufficient plainness as to the importance attached by the Church to this initiatory rite; this importance she gives to it in other places: none, unbaptized, must approach her altar to take the "bread of life:" none, unbaptized, must be buried by her ministers, "in sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life." The baptized are within the ark of the Church; the unbaptized are struggling in the waves of God's wrath outside; no hand can be outstretched to save them; they are strangers, aliens, to the covenant of promise; they are without hope. The whole office for infants reads like a play: the clergyman asks that the infant "may receive remission of his sins;" what sins? The people are admonished "that they defer not the Baptism of their children longer than the first or second Sunday next after their birth." What sins can a baby a week old have committed? from what sins can he need release? for what sins can he ask forgiveness? And yet, here is a whole congregation prostrate before Almighty God, praying that a tiny long-robed baby may be forgiven, may be pardoned his sins of—coming into the world when God sent him! The

ceremony would be ludicrous were it not so pitiful. And supposing that the infant does need forgiveness, and has sins to be washed away, why should a few drops of water, sprinkled on the face—or bonnet—of the baby, or even the immersion of his body in the font, wash away the sins of his soul? The water is “sanctified;” we pray: “Sanctify this water to the mystical washing away of sin.” As the hymn sweetly puts it:

“The water in this font
Is water, by gross mortals eyed;
But, seen by faith, 'tis blood
Out of a dear friend's side.”

Blood once more! how Christians cling to the revolting imagery of a bygone and barbarous age of gross conceptions. And, applied by faith, it cleanses the soul of the child from sin. Well, the whole thing is consistent: the invisible soul is washed from invisible sin by invisible blood, and to all outward appearance the child remains after baptism exactly what it was before—except it chance to get inflammation of the lungs, as we have known happen, from High Church free use of water, which is, perhaps, the promised baptism of fire. The promises of the sponsors are in full accordance with the rest of the services; promises made by other people, in the child's name, as to his future conduct, over which they have no control. The baby renounces the devil and all his belongings, believes the Apostles' Creed, and answers “that is my desire,” when asked if he will be baptized; all which “is very pretty acting,” but jars somewhat on the feeling of reality which ought surely to characterize a believer's intercourse with his God. The child being baptized and signed with the Cross, “is regenerate,” according to the declaration of the priest. Some contend that the Church of England does not teach baptismal regeneration, but it is hard to see how any one can read this service, and then

deny the teaching; it is clearer and fuller than is the teaching of her voice upon most subjects. The ceremony of baptism and the idea of regeneration are both derived from the sun-worship of which so many traces have already been pointed out: the worshippers of Mithra practised baptism, and it is common to the various phases of the solar faith. Regeneration, in some parts, especially in India, was obtained in a different fashion: a hole through a rock, or a narrow passage between two, was the sacred spot, and a worshipper, squeezing himself through such an opening, was regenerated, and was, by this literal representation of birth, born a second time, born into a new life, and the sins of the former life were no longer accounted to him. Many such holes are still preserved and revered in India, and there can be little doubt that the ancient Druidic remains bear traces of being adapted for this same ceremony, although a natural fissure appears ever to have been accounted the most sacred.*

One ought scarcely to leave unnoted the preamble to the first prayer in the baptismal service: "Who of thy great mercy didst save Noah and his family in the ark from perishing by water; and also didst safely lead the children of Israel thy people through the Red Sea, figuring thereby thy holy baptism; and by the baptism of thy well-beloved Son Jesus Christ, in the river Jordan, didst sanctify water to the mystical washing of sin." In the two first examples given the choice of the Church appears to be peculiarly unfortunate, as in each case water was the element to be escaped *from*, and it was a source of death, not of life; perhaps, though, there is a subtle meaning

* Even in this country, at Brimham Rocks, near Ripon, in Yorkshire, the dead form of the custom is, or was, until very lately, kept up by the guide sending all visitors, who chose to avail themselves of the privilege, through such a fissure.

in the *Red Sea*, it points to the blood of Christ: but then, again, the Red Sea drowned people, and surely the anti-type is not so dangerous as that? It must be a mystery. It would be interesting to know how many of the educated clergymen who read this prayer believe in the story of the Noachian deluge, and of the miraculous passage of the Red Sea; and further, how many of them believe that God, by these fables, figured his holy baptism. Will the nineteenth century ever summon up energy enough to shake off these remnants of a dead superstition, and be honest enough to stop using a form of words which is no longer a vehicle of belief? When the Prayer Book was compiled these words had a meaning; to-day they have none. Shall not a second Reformation sweep away these dead beliefs, even as the first swept away for its own age the phrases which represented an earlier and coarser creed?

THE ORDER OF CONFIRMATION.

“These signs shall follow them that believe: In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.” In those remarkable days the “order of Confirmation” might have been in consonance with its surroundings, a state of things which is very far from being its present position. Mr. Spurgeon, writing for the benefit of street preachers, lately pointed out very sensibly that as the Holy Ghost no longer gave the gift of tongues, they had “better stick to their grammars,” and in these degenerate

days honest effort is likely to show results more satisfactory than those which ensue from the laying on of Bishops' hands. When the Apostles performed this ceremony which the Bishop now performs after their example, definite proofs of its efficacy were said to have been seen ; so much so, indeed, that Simon, the sorcerer, wished to invest some money in heavenly securities, so that "on whomsoever I lay hands he may receive the Holy Ghost." A Simon would manifestly never be found nowadays ready to pay a Bishop for the power of causing the effects of Confirmation. So far as the carnal eye can see, the white-robed, veiled young ladies, and the shamefaced black-coated boys, who throng the church on a Confirmation day, return from the altar very much the same as they went up to it: no one begins to speak with tongues ; if they did, the beadle would probably interfere and quench the Spirit with the greatest promptitude. They are supposed to have received some special gifts : "the spirit of wisdom and understanding ; the spirit of counsel and ghostly strength ; the spirit of knowledge and true godliness ;" and in addition to these six spirits, there is one more : "the spirit of thy holy fear." No less than seven spirits, then, enter these lads and lasses. Wisdom and understanding are easily perceptible : are they wiser after Confirmation than they were before ? do they understand more rapidly ? do they know more ? if there be no perceptible difference is the presence of the Holy Spirit of none effect ? if of none effect, can his presence be of any use, of the very smallest advantage ? if of no use, why make all this parade about giving a thing whose gift makes the recipient no richer than he was before ? Besides, what certainty can there be that the Holy Ghost is given at all ? Allowing—what seems to an outsider a gross piece of irreverence—that the Holy Ghost is in the fingers of the Bishop to be given away when it suits the Bishop's convenience, or is in

a sort of reservoir, of which the Bishop turns the tap and lets the stream of grace descend—allowing all this as possible, ought not some “sign to follow them that believe?” How can we be sure that the Bishop is not an impostor, going through a conjurer’s gestures and mutterings, and no magic results accruing? If, in the ordinary course of daily life, any one came and offered us some valuable things he said that he possessed, and then went through the form of giving them to us, saying: “Here they are; guard and preserve them for the rest of your life;” and the outstretched hand contained nothing at all, and we found ourselves with nothing in our grasp, should we be content with his assurance that we had really got them, although we might not be able to see them, and we ought to have sufficient faith to take his word for it? Should we not utterly refuse to believe that we had received anything unless we had some proof of having done so, and were in some way the better or the worse for it? The truth is that people’s religion is, to them, a matter of such small importance that they do not trouble themselves about proof—Faith is enough to comfort them; the six week-days require their brains, their efforts, their thought: the Sunday is the Lord’s day, and he must see to it: earth needs all their earnest attention, but heaven must take care of itself; the validity of an earthly title is important, and the confirmation of a right to inherit property in this world is eagerly welcomed, but the Confirmation to a heavenly inheritance is a mere farce, which it is the fashion to go through about the age of fifteen, but which is only a fashion, the confirmation of a faith in nothing in particular to an invisible heritage of nothing at all.

THE FORM OF THE SOLEMNIZATION OF
MATRIMONY.

One of the most curious blunders regarding orthodox Christianity is, that it has tended to the elevation of woman. As a matter of fact, the Eastern ideas about women are embodied in Christianity, and these ideas are essentially degraded and degrading. From the time when Paul bade women obey their husbands, Augustine's mother was beaten, unresisting, by Augustine's father, and Jerome fled from woman's charms, and monks declaimed against the daughters of Eve, down to the present day, when Peter's authority is used against woman suffrage, Christianity has consistently regarded woman as a creature to be subject to man, because, being deceived, she was first in transgression. The Church service for matrimony is redolent of this barbarous idea, relic of a time when men seized wives by force, or else purchased them, so that the wives became, in literal fact, the property of their husbands. We learn that matrimony was "instituted of God in the time of man's innocency, signifying unto us the mystical union that is between Christ and his Church." It would be interesting to know how many of those joined by the Church believe in the Paradise story of man's innocency and fall. It seems that Christ has adorned the holy estate by his first miracle in Cana; but the adornment is rather of a dubious character, when we reflect that the probable effect of the miracle would be a scene somewhat too gay, from the enormous quantity of wine made by Christ for men who already had "well drunk." Christ's approval of marriage may well be considered doubtful when we remember that a virgin was chosen as his mother, that he himself remained unmarried, and that he distinctly places celibacy higher than marriage in Matt. xix. 11, 12,

where he urges: "he that is able to receive it let him receive it." St. Paul also, though he allows it to his converts, advises virginity in preference: "I say to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I;" "he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better" (see throughout 1 Cor. vii.) The reasons given for marriage are surely misplaced; last of all, it is said that marriage is "ordained for the mutual society, help, and comfort that the one ought to have of the other;" this, instead of "thirdly," ought to be "first." "As a remedy against sin and to avoid fornication, that such persons as have not the gift of continency might marry," is not a reason very honourable to the marriage estate, nor very delicate to read out before a mixed congregation to a young bride and bridegroom; so strongly objectionable is the heedless coarseness of this preface felt to be that in many churches it is entirely omitted, although it is retained—as are all remains of a coarser age—in the Prayer-Book as published by authority. The promise exchanged between the contracting parties is of far too sweeping a character, and is immoral, because promising what may be beyond the powers of the promisers to perform; "to love" "so long as ye both shall live," and "till death us do part," is a pledge far too wide; love does not stay by promising, nor is love a feeling which can be made to order. A promise to live always together might be made, although that would be unwise in this changing world, and the endless processes in the Divorce Court are a satire on this so-called joined by God; "what God hath joined together" man does continually "put asunder," and it would be wiser to adapt the service to the altered circumstances of the times in which we live. The promise of obedience and service on the woman's part should also be eliminated, and the contract should be a simple promise of fidelity between

two equal friends. The declaration of the man as he places the ring on the woman's finger is as archaic as the rest of this fossil service, and about as true: "With all my worldly goods I thee endow," says the man, when, as a matter of fact, he becomes possessed of all his wife's property and she does not become possessed of his. One of the concluding prayers is a delightful specimen of Prayer-Book science: "O God, who of thy mighty power hast made all things of nothing." What was the general aspect of affairs when there was "nothing?" how did something emerge where "nothing" was before? if God filled all space, was he "nothing?" is the existence of nothing a conceivable idea? can people think of nothing except when they don't think at all? "who also (after other things set in order) didst appoint that out of man (created after thine own image and similitude) woman should take her beginning:" "out of man," that is out of one of man's ribs; has any one tried to picture the scene: Almighty God, who has no body nor parts, taking one of Adam's ribs, and closing up the flesh, and "out of the rib made he a woman." God, a pure spirit, holding a man's rib, not in his hands, for he has none, and "making" a woman out of it, fashioning the rib into skull, and arms, and ribs, and legs. Can a more ludicrous position be imagined; and Adam? What became of his internal economy? was he made originally with a rib too much, to provide against the emergency, or did he go, for the rest of his life, with a rib too little? And the Church of England endorses this ridiculous old-world fable. Man was created "after thine own image and similitude." What is the image of God? He is a spirit and has no similitude. If man is made in his image, God must be a celestial man, and cannot possibly be omnipresent. Besides in Genesis i. 27, where it is stated that "God created man in his own image," it distinctly goes on to declare: "in the image of God

created he him; *male and female* created he them. Thus the woman is made in God's image as much as the man, and God's image is "male and female." All students know that the ancient ideas of God give him this double nature, and that no trinity is complete without the addition of the female element; but the pious compilers of the Prayer-Book did not probably intend thus to transplant the simple old nature-worship into their marriage office. Once more we hear of Adam and Eve in the next prayer, and we cannot help thinking that, considering all the trouble Eve brought upon her husband by her flirtation with the serpent, she is made rather too prominent a figure in the marriage service. The ceremony winds up with a long exhortation, made of quotations from the Epistles, on the duties of husbands and wives. Husbands are to love their wives because Christ loved a church—a reason that does not seem specially *à propos*, as husbands are not required to die for their wives or to present them to themselves glorious wives, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing (!); nor would most husbands desire that their wives' conversation should be "coupled with fear." Why should women be taught thus to abase themselves? They are promised as a reward that they shall be the daughters of Sarah; but that is no great privilege, nor are English wives likely to call their husbands "lord;" if they did not adorn themselves with plaited hair and pretty apparel, their husbands would be sure to grumble, and the only defence that can be made for this absurd exhortation is that nobody ever listens to it.

Among the various reforms needed in the Marriage Laws one imperatively necessary is that all marriages should be made civil contracts—that is, that the contract which is made by citizens of the State, and which affects the interests of the State, should be entered into before a secular State official;

if after that the parties desired a religious ceremony, they could go through any arrangements they pleased in their own churches and chapels, but the civil contract should be compulsory and should be the only one recognised by the law. Of course the Church might maintain its peculiar marriage as long as it chose, but it would probably soon pass out of fashion if it were not acknowledged as binding by the State.

THE ORDER FOR THE VISITATION OF THE SICK.

Of all the services in the Prayer-Book this is, perhaps, the most striking relic of barbarism, the most completely at variance with sound and reasonable thought. The clergyman entering into a house of sickness, and as he enters the sick man's room and catches sight of him, kneeling down and exclaiming, as though horror-stricken: "Remember not, Lord, our iniquities, nor the iniquities of our forefathers; spare us, good Lord, spare Thy people whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy most precious blood, and be not angry with us for ever." This clergyman reminds one of nothing so much as of one of Job's friends, who appear to have been an even more painful infliction than Job's boils. The sickness, the patient is told, "is God's visitation," and "for what cause soever this sickness is sent unto you: whether it be to try your faith for the example of others, . . . or else it be sent unto you to correct and amend in you whatsoever doth offend the eyes of your heavenly Father; know you certainly, that if you truly repent you of your sins, and bear your sickness patiently, . . . it shall turn to your profit, and help you forward in the right way that leadeth

unto everlasting life." One might question the justice of Almighty God if the theory be correct that the sickness may be sent "to try your patience for the example of others;" why should one unfortunate victim be tormented simply that others may have the advantage of seeing how well he bears it? If we are to endeavour to conform ourselves to the image of God, then it would seem that we should be doing right if we racked our neighbours occasionally to "try their patience for the example of others." And is the idea of God a reverent one? What should we think of an earthly father who tortured one of his children in order to teach the others how to bear pain? if we should condemn the earthly father as wickedly cruel, why should the same action be righteous when done by the Father in heaven? If we accept the second reason given for the sickness, it is difficult to see the rationale of it. Why should illness of the body correct illness of the mind; does pain cure fretfulness, or fever increase truthfulness? Is not sickness likely rather to bring out and strengthen mental faults than to weaken them? And how far is it true that sickness is, in any sense, the visitation of God for moral delinquencies? Is it not true, on the contrary, that a man may lie, rob, cheat, slander, tyrannise, and yet, if he observe the laws of health, may remain in robust vigour, while an upright, sincere, honest and truthful man, disregarding those same laws, may be miserably feeble and suffer an early death? Is it, or is it not a fact, that in the Middle Ages, when people prayed much and studied little, when the peasant went to the shrine for a cure instead of to the doctor, when sanitary science was unknown, and cleanliness was a virtue undreamed of,—is it, or is it not true, that pestilence and black death then swept off their thousands, while these terrible scourges have been practically driven away in modern times by proper attention to sanitary measures, by

improved drainage and greater cleanliness of living? How can that be a visitation of God for moral transgressions, which can be prevented by man if he attends to physical laws? Is man's power greater than God's, and can he thus play with the thunderbolts of the divine displeasure? The clergyman prays that "the sense of his weakness may add strength to his faith;" what fine irony is here, as body and mind grow weak faith grows strong; as a man is less able to think, he becomes more ready to believe. It is impossible to pass, without a word of censure, over the passage in the exhortation, taken from the Epistle to the Hebrews, which says, "for they (fathers of our flesh) verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure." Good earthly fathers do not chasten their children for their own amusement, while God does it "for our profit;" on the contrary, they do it for the improvement of their children, while God alone, if there be a hell, tortures his children for his own pleasure and for no gain to them. The succeeding portion of the Exhortation, that, "our way to eternal joy is to suffer here with Christ," is full of that sad asceticism which has done so much to darken the world since the birth of Christ; men have been so engaged in looking for the "eternal joy" that they have let pass unnoted the misery here; they have been so busy planting flowers in heaven that they have let weeds grow here; yes, and they have rejoiced in the misery and in the weeds, because they were only strangers and pilgrims, and the tribulation, which was but temporal, increased the weight of the glory that was eternal. Thus has Christianity blighted the flowers of this world, and entwined the brows of its followers with wreaths of thorns. The concluding portion of the exhortation deals with the duty of self-examination and self-accusation, that you may "not be accused and condemned in that fearful

judgment." Very wholesome teaching for a sick man; sickness always makes a person morbid, and the Church steps in to encourage the unwholesome feeling; sickness always makes a person timid and unnerved, and the Church steps in to talk about a "fearful judgment," and bewilders and stuns the confused brain by the terrible pictures called up to the mind by the thought of the last day.

But worse follows; for after the sick person has said that he steadfastly believes the creed, the clergyman is bidden by the rubric to "examine whether he repent him truly of his sins, and be in charity with all the world." Imagine a sick person being worried by an examination of this kind, putting aside the gross impertinence of the whole affair. Further, "the minister should not omit earnestly to move such persons as are of ability to be liberal to the poor." When every one remembers the terrible scandals of by-gone days, when priests drew into the net of the Church the goods of the dying, using threat of hell and promise of heaven to win that which should have been left for the widow and the orphan, one marvels that such a rubric should be left to recall the rapaciousness and the greed of the Church, and to invite priests to grasp at the wealth slipping out of dying hands. And here the sick person is to "be moved to make a special confession of his sins, if he feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter, and the priest is bidden to absolve him, for Christ having "left power to his Church to absolve by his authority committed to me," says the priest, "I absolve thee." Confession; delegated authority; priestly absolution; such is the doctrine of the Church of England: all the untold abominations of the confessional are involved in this rubric and sentence, for if the man can absolve a man at one time, he can do it at another; the precious power should surely not be left unused and wasted; whenever sin presses, behold

the remedy, and thus we are launched and in full sail. But never in England shall the confessional again flourish; never again shall English women be corrupted by the foul questions of the priests; never again shall Englishmen have their mental vigour and virility destroyed by such degradation. Let the Church fall that countenances such an accursed thing, and leave English purity and English courage to grow and flourish unchecked.

The devil is in great force in this service, as is only right in a so generally barbarous an office: "Let the enemy have no advantage of him;" "defend him from the danger of the enemy;" "renew in him whatsoever hath been decayed by the fraud and malice of the devil;" "the wiles of Satan;" "deliver him from fear of the enemy;" all this must convey to the sick person a cheerful idea of the devil lingering about his bed, and trying to get hold of him before it is too late to drag him down to hell.

Is there any meaning at all in the expression: "the Almighty Lord . . . to whom all things in heaven, in earth, and *under the earth* do bow and obey?" Where is "under the earth?" The sun is under some part of the earth to some people at any given time; the stars are under, or above, according to the point of view from which they are looked at; of course the expression is only a survival from a time when the earth was flat and the bottomless pit was under it, only it seems a pity to continue to use expressions which have lost all their meaning and are now thoroughly ridiculous. People seem to think that any old things are good enough for God's service.

The last two prayers are remarkable chiefly for their melancholy and craven tone towards God: "we humbly commend," "most humbly beseeching thee." Surely God is not supposed to be an Eastern despot, desiring this kind of cringing at his feet. Yet the "Prayer for persons troubled in mind or in consci-

ence " is one pitiful wail, as though only by passionate entreaty could God be moved to mercy, and he were longing to strike, and with difficulty withheld from avenging himself. When will men learn to stand upright on their feet, instead of thus crouching on their knees? when will they learn to strive to live nobly, and then to fear no celestial anger, either in life or in death?

THE ORDER FOR THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD.

It is a little difficult to write a critical notice of a funeral office, simply because people's feelings are so much bound up in it that any criticism seems a cruelty, and any interference seems an impertinence. Round the open grave all controversy should be hushed, that no jarring sounds may mingle with the sobs of the mourners, and no quarrels wring the torn hearts of the survivors. Our criticism of this office, then, will be brief and grave.

The opening verses strike us first as manifestly inappropriate: "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die;" yet the dead is then being carried to his last home, and the words seem a mockery spoken in face of a corpse. In the Fourth Gospel they preface the raising of Lazarus, and of course are then very significant, but to-day no power raises our dead, no voice of Jesus says to the mourners, "Weep not." The second verse from Job is—as is well known—an utter mistranslation: "without my flesh" would be nearer the truth than "in my flesh," and "worms" and "body" are not mentioned in the original at all. It seems a pity that in such solemn moments known falsehoods should be used.

The whole argument in the 15th chap. of I Corinthians is the reverse of convincing. Christ is not the first fruits of them that slept. A dead man had been raised by touching the bones of Elisha (II Kings xiii. 21). Elisha, in his lifetime, had raised the dead son of the Shunamite (II Kings iv.); Elijah, before him, had raised the son of the widow of Zarephath (I Kings xvii); Christ had raised Lazarus, the daughter of Jairus, and the son of the widow of Nain. In no sense, then, if the Scriptures of the Christians be true, can it be said that Christ has become the first fruits, the first begotten from the dead. "For since by man came death"; but death did not come by man; myriads of ages before man was in the world animals were born, lived, and died, and they have left their fossilised remains to prove the falsity of the popular belief. We notice also that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." If this be so, what becomes of "the resurrection of the flesh," spoken of in the Baptismal and Visitation Offices? What has become of the "flesh and bones" which Christ had after his resurrection and with which, according to the 4th Article, he has gone into heaven? Cannot Christ "inherit the kingdom of God"? It is hard to see how, in any sense, the resurrection of Christ can be taken as a proof of the resurrection of man. Christ was only dead 36 or 37 hours before he is said to have risen again; there was no time for bodily decay, no time for corruption to destroy his frame: how could the restoration to life of a man whose body was in perfect preservation prove the possibility of the resurrection of the bodies which have long since been resolved into their constituent elements, and have gone to form other bodies, and to give shape to other modes of existence? People talk in such superior fashion of the resurrection that they never stoop to remember its necessary details, or to think where is to be found sufficient matter where-

with to clothe all the human souls on the resurrection morn. The bodies of the dead make the earth more productive; they nourish vegetable existence; transformed into grass they feed the sheep and the cattle; transformed into these they sustain human beings; transformed into these they form new bodies once more, and pass from birth to death, and from death to birth again, a perfect circle of life, transmuted by Nature's alchemy from form to form. No man has a freehold of his body; he possesses only a life-tenancy, and then it passes into other hands. The melancholy dirge which succeeds this chapter sounds like a wail of despair: man "hath but a short time to live and is full of misery. He cometh up and is cut down like a flower; he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay." Can any teaching be more utterly unwholesome? It is the confession of the most complete helplessness, the recognition of the futility of toil. And then the agonised pleading: "O Lord God most holy, O Lord most mighty, O holy and most merciful Saviour, deliver us not into the bitter pains of eternal death." But if he be most merciful, whence all this need of weeping and wailing? If he be most merciful, what danger can there be of the bitter pains of eternal death? And again the cry rises: "Shut not thy merciful ears to our prayer; but spare us, Lord most holy, O God most mighty, O holy and merciful Saviour, thou most worthy Judge Eternal, suffer us not, at our last hour, for any pains of death, to fall from thee." It is nothing but the wail of humanity, face to face with the agony of death, feeling its utter helplessness before the great enemy, and clinging to any straw which may float within reach of the drowning grasp; it is the horror of Life facing Death, a horror that seems felt only by the fully living and not by the dying; it is the recoil of vigorous vitality from the silence and chillness of the tomb.

After this comes a sudden change of tone, and the

mourners are told of God's "great mercy" in taking the departed, and of the "burden of the flesh," and they are bidden to give "hearty thanks" for the dead being delivered "out of the miseries of this sinful world." Can anything be more unreal? There is not one mourner there who desires to share in the great mercy, who wants to be freed from the burden of the flesh, or desires deliverance from the miseries of this world. Why should people thus play a farce beside the grave? Do they expect God to believe them, or to be deceived by such hypocrisy?

It is urged by some that the Church cannot have a "sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life" as regards some of those whom she buries with this service; and it is manifest that, if the Bible be true, drunkards and others who are to be cast into the lake of fire, can scarcely rise to eternal life at the same time, and therefore the Church has no right to express a hope where God has pronounced condemnation. The Rubric only shuts out of the hope the unbaptized, the excommunicated, and the suicide; all others have a right to burial at her hands, and to the hope of a joyful resurrection, in spite of the Bible.

We may hope that the day will soon come when people may die in England and may be buried in peace without this cry of pain and superstition over their graves. Wherever cemeteries are within reasonable distance the Rationalist may now be buried, lovingly and reverently, without the echo of that in which he disbelieved during life sounding over his grave; but throughout many small towns and country villages the Burial Service of the Church is practically obligatory, and is enforced by clerical bigotry. But the passing knell of the Establishment sounds clearer and clearer, and soon those who have rejected her services in life shall be free from her ministrations at the tomb.
