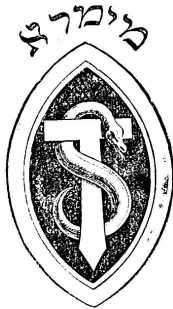


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THE BEAUTIES
OF
THE PRAYER-BOOK.



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THE
BEAUTIES OF THE PRAYER-BOOK.

MORNING PRAYER.

“**H**ABIT is second nature,” saith a wise old saw, so it must be from custom that it has become natural to Church people to repeat placidly, week after week, the same palpable self-contradictions and absurdities. A sensible, shrewd man of business puts away his papers on the Saturday night, and apparently locks his mind up with them in his desk; certain it is that he

“Goes on Sunday to the church,
And sits among his boys;
He hears the parson pray and preach,”

and yet never discovers that his boys are repeating the most contradictory responses, while the parson is enunciating as axioms the most startling propositions.

When the preliminary silence in church is broken by the “sentences,” the first words that fall from the clergyman’s lips are a distinct declaration of the conditions of salvation: “When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive;” and we are further instructed as to our sins, that “if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” These very plain statements take high and comprehensible ground. God is supposed to desire that man should be righteous, and is therefore naturally satisfied when

“the wicked forsakes his way and the unrighteous man his path.” We proceed, then, to confess our sins, and after Mrs. A., whose eyes are straying after her neighbour’s bonnet, has confessed that she is erring and straying like a lost sheep, and Mrs. B., who is devising a way to make an old dress look new, has owned plaintively that she is following the devices of her own heart; and Squire C., of the rubicund visage and broad shoulders, has sonorously remarked that there is no health in him, and his son, with the joyous face, has cheerfully acknowledged that he is a miserable sinner—after these very appropriate and reasonable confessions to a Divine Being who “seeth the heart,” and may therefore be supposed to take them for what they are worth, have been duly gone through, we are somewhat puzzled to hear the clergyman announce that God “pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent, and unfeignedly believe His holy Gospel.” What is this sudden appendix to the before-declared conditions of salvation? We had been told that if we confessed our sins God’s faithfulness and justice would cause him to forgive us; here we have duly done so, and surely the language is sufficiently strong; we are yet suddenly called upon to believe a “holy Gospel” as a preliminary to forgiveness. But we are not yet, to use a colloquialism, out of the wood; for while we are moodily meditating on this infraction of our contract the time slips on unobserved, and, it being a feast-day, we are startled by a stern voice conveying the cheerful intelligence, “Whosoever will be saved, *before all things*, it is necessary that he hold the Catholic Faith. Which Faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.” “Before all things?” before repentance? before turning away from our wickedness? before doing that which is lawful and right? And what is this “Faith” which we must keep whole and undefiled

if we would save our souls alive? A bewildering jumble of triplets and units, mingled in inextricable confusion. But as he that "will be saved must thus think of the Trinity," we will try and disentangle the thread of salvation. "The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God," says the parson. "They are not three Gods, but one God," shout out the people. We are compelled "to acknowledge every Person by Himself to be God and Lord," reiterates the parson. "We are forbidden by the Catholic Religion to say there be three Gods or three Lords," obstinately persist the people. Then, after some rather intrusive particulars about the family (and very intricate) relations of the Father to the Son, and of both to the Holy Ghost, we are told that "so"—why *so*?—"there is one Father, not three Fathers, one Son, not three Sons, one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts." In so far as we have been able to follow the meaning, or rather the no-meaning, of the preceding sentences, no one said anything about three Fathers, three Sons, or three Holy Ghosts. The definite article *the* had been used in each case with a singular noun. We imagine the clause must have been inserted because all ideas as to the meaning of numerals must have been by this time so hopelessly lost by the congregation, that it became necessary to remark that "the Father" meant one Father, and not three. The list of necessities for salvation is not yet complete, for "furthermore it is necessary to everlasting salvation, that he also believe rightly the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ." So far, then, from its being true that the wicked man who turns from his sins shall save his soul alive, we find that our sinner must also believe the Gospel, must accept contradictory arithmetical assertions, must think of the Trinity in a way which makes thought a ludicrous impossibility, and must believe *rightly* all the details of the method by which

6 *The Beauties of the Prayer-Book.*

a Divine Being became a human being. If a sinner chances to go out of church after the first sentence, and from being a drunkard becomes temperate, from being a liar becomes truthful, from being a profligate becomes chaste, and foolishly imagines that he is thereby doing God's will, and thus saving his soul alive, he will certainly, according to the Athanasian Creed, wake up from his pleasant delusion to find himself in everlasting fire. As sceptics, we need offer no opinion as to *which* is right, the creed or the text; we only suggest that *both* cannot be correct, and that it would be more satisfactory if the Church, in her wisdom, would make up her venerable mind which is the proper path, and then keep in it. After all this, we are in no way surprised to learn from a collect that being saved is dependent on quite a new support, namely, on the knowledge we have of God. How many more things may be necessary to salvation it is impossible to say at this point, but the office for Morning Prayer, at any rate, gives us no more. It would be rash to conclude, however, that we have fulfilled all, for the Church has some more scattered up and down her Prayer-Book; the end of all which double-dealing is, that we can never be sure that we have really fulfilled every condition; sad experience teaches us that when the Church says, "do so-and-so, and you shall be saved," she is, meanwhile, whispering under her breath, "provided you also do everything else."

We fail also to see the reasonableness of the constant cry, "for the sake of Jesus Christ," or "through Jesus Christ." We ask that we may lead "a godly, righteous, and sober life" *for His sake*; but this is just what we are told God wishes already, so why should He be asked to grant it for some one else's sake, as though He were unwilling that we should be righteous, and can only be coaxed into allowing us to be so by a favourite son? In the same way we are

to come to God's "eternal joy" through Jesus, which is, by the way, another of these endless conditions of salvation. We ask to be defended from our enemies "through the might of Jesus Christ," as though God Himself was not strong enough for the task; and God is urged to send down His healthful Spirit for the "honour of our advocate and Mediator," although that very advocate told His disciples that God would always give that spirit to those who asked for it. To the outside critic, these continual references to Jesus, as though God grudged all good gifts, appear very dishonouring to the "Father in Heaven."

Is it considered necessary to press God vehemently to hurry himself? "O God, *make speed* to save us. O Lord, *make haste* to help us." Will not God, of His own accord, do things at the best possible time? and further, is it possible for a Divine Being to make haste?

It will, perhaps, be considered hypercritical to object to the versicles: "Give peace in our time, O Lord, *because* there is none other that fighteth for us but only thou, O God." What more do they want than an almighty reinforcement? "None other?" Well, we should have fancied that God *and* somebody else were really more than were needed. At any rate, it sounds very insulting to say to God, "please give us peace, since we cannot count on any assistance except yours."

We have nothing to say about the prayers for the Royal Family, except that they do not show any very attractive results, and that it must have much edified George IV. to hear himself spoken of as a "most religious and gracious king." Never surely was a family so much prayed for, but *cui bono*? If the "Bishops, Curates, and all congregations" truly please God, he is about the only person that they succeed in pleasing, for the Bishops abuse the clergy, and the clergy abuse the Bishops, and the congregations abuse both.

Of the last prayer, we must note the exceeding failure of the petition to grant the Church knowledge of truth, and we cannot help marvelling why, if they really desire to know the truth, they so invariably frown at and endeavour to crush out every earnest search after truth, every effort for clearer light. Of all things that can happen to the Church, the knowledge of the truth would be the least "expedient for" her, for she would fade away before the sunshine of truth as ghosts are said to fly at the cockcrow which announces the dawn.

A criticism on the office of Morning Prayer is scarcely complete without a few words upon the canticles appointed to be daily sung by the faithful to the glory of God. Anything more ludicrously absurd than these from the lips of our congregations it would indeed be difficult to imagine. The *Venite* (Ps. xcvi.) is the first we are called upon to take part in, and the first shock comes when we find ourselves chanting "The Lord is a great God and a *great king above all gods.*" "Above all gods!" what terrible heresy have we been unwittingly committing ourselves to? Is there not only one God—or, at least, it may be three—but, if three, they are co-equal, and no one is above the other; who are these "all gods" that "the Lord" is "king above?" We remember for a moment that when this psalm was written the gods of the nations around Israel were believed to have a real existence, and that, therefore, it was no inconsistency in the mouth of the Hebrew to rejoice that his national god was ruler above the gods of other peoples. This explanation is reasonable, but then it does not explain why we, who believe not in this multiplicity of deities, should pretend that we do. Our equanimity is not restored by the next phrase, "In his hand are all the corners of the earth;" but the earth is a globe, and has no corners. A misty remembrance floats through our mind of Iræneus stating that there were four gospels be-

cause there were four corners to the earth and four winds that blew; but since his time things have changed, and the corners have been smoothed off. Is it quite honest to say in God's praise a thing which we know to be untrue, and must we be unscientific because we are devotional? We then hear about our fathers being forty years in the wilderness, although we know that they were not there at all, unless the people—generally looked upon as amiable lunatics—are correct, who assert that the English nation is descended from the ten lost tribes of Israel. Why should we pretend to God that we are Jews, when both He and we know perfectly well that we are nothing of the kind? We come to the *Te Deum*, said to have been composed by S. Ambrose for the baptism of S. Augustine:—"To thee cherubin and seraphin continually do cry." Putting aside the manifest weariness both to God and to the cryers of the never-ceasing repetition of these words, and the degrading idea of God implied in the thought that it gives Him any pleasure to be perpetually assured of His holiness, as though it were a doubtful matter—we cannot help inquiring, "Who are these cherubin and seraphin?" According to the Bible, they are six-winged creatures, who cover their faces with two wings, and their feet with two more, and fly with the remaining pair: they may be seen in pictures of the ark, balancing themselves on their feet-covering wings, and preventing themselves from falling by steadying each other with another pair. "Lord God of Sabaoth," or "of Hosts;" is this a reasonable name for one supposed to be a "God of peace?" The elder Jewish and the Christian ideas of God here come into direct collision: according to one, "the Lord is a man of war" (Ex. xv.), while the other represents him as "the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." (Isai. ix.) The *Te Deum* midway changes the object of its song, and addresses itself to the Son instead

of to the Father. How far this is permissible is much disputed, for certain it is that in the early ages of Christianity prayer was addressed to the Father *only*, and that one of the Fathers* sharply rebukes those who pray to the Son, since they thereby deprive the Father of the honour due to Him alone. How this can be, when Father and Son are one, we do not pretend to explain. Then ensue those curious details regarding Christ which we shall touch upon in dealing later with the Apostles' Creed. We find ourselves, presently, asking to be kept "this day without sin;" yet, we are perfectly well aware, all the time, that God will do nothing of the kind, and that all Christians believe that they sin every day. Why does the Church teach her children to sing this in the morning, and then prepare a "confession" for the evening, unless she feels perfectly sure that God will pay no attention to her prayer? The wearisome reiteration in the *Benedicite* is so thoroughly recognised that it is very seldom heard in the church, while the *Benedictus* (Luke i.) is open to the same charge of unreality as is the *Venite*, that it is a song for Jews only. Many other faults and absurdities might be pointed out which disfigure Morning Prayer, even if the whole idea of prayer be left untouched. The prayers of the Prayer-Book are dishonouring to God from their childishness, their unreality, their folly, their conflict with sound knowledge. Allowing that prayer may be reasonable, these prayers are unreasonable; allowing that prayer may be reverent, these prayers are irreverent; allowing that prayer may be sincere, these prayers are insincere. They are fragments of an earlier age transplanted into the present, and they are as ludicrous as would be men walking about in our streets to-day clad in the armour of the Middle Ages, the ages of Darkness and of Prayer.

* Origen.

EVENING PRAYER.

The Church, in her wisdom, fearing that the quaint conceits and impossibilities which we have referred to, the—

“Jewels which adorn the spouse
Of the eternal glorious King,”

should not be sufficiently appreciated and admired by her children, if presented to their adoration once only on every day, has appointed for the use of the faithful an office of Evening Prayer, which, in its main features, is identical with that which is to be “said or sung” each morning. Sentences, address, confession, absolution, Lord’s Prayer, and versicles, are all exactly reproduced, and Psalms and Lessons follow in due course, varying from day to day. To take the whole Psalter, and analyse it, would be a task too long for our own patience, or for that of our readers, so we only pick out a few salient absurdities, and ask why English men and women should be found singing sentences which have no beauty to recommend them, and no meaning to dignify them. We will not lay stress on the quaintness of a congregation standing up and gravely singing: “Or ever your pots be made hot with thorns, so let indignation vex him, even as a thing that is raw” (Ps. lviii.); we will not ask what the clergyman means where he reads out to his congregation: “Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove.” (Ps. lxviii.) These are isolated passages, which a pen might erase, retaining the major part of the Psalter: we go further, and challenge it as a whole, asserting that it is ludicrously inappropriate as a song-book for sensible people, even although those people may be desirous of praying to, or praising God. Our strictures are here levelled, not at prayer *as* prayer, but simply at this particular form of prayer. In the first place the Psalter is written only for a single nation; it is full of local

allusions, and of references to Israelitish history, which are only reasonable in the mouth of a Jew. With what amount of sense can an English congregation every 15th evening of the month sing such a Psalm as the lxxviii., recounting all the marvels of the plagues and of the exodus, or on the following day plead with God to help them, because "the heathen are come into Thine inheritance; Thy holy temple have they defiled, and made Jerusalem an heap of stones?" (Ps. lxxix.) Is there any respect to God in telling him that "we are become an open shame to our enemies; a very scorn and derision unto them that are round about us" (*v.* 4), when, as a matter of simple fact, the speakers are become nothing of the kind? Can it be thought to be consistent with reverence to God to make these extraordinary assertions in praying to Him, and then to base upon them the most urgent pleas for His immediate aid? for we find the congregation proceeding: "Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Thy Name; O deliver us and be merciful unto our sins for Thy Name's sake. . . . O let the vengeance of Thy servant's blood which is shed be openly shewed upon the heathen in our sight. O let the sorrowful sighing of the prisoners come before Thee; according to the greatness of Thy power, preserve Thou those that are appointed to die" (*vv.* 9, 10, 11). Now in all sober seriousness what does this mean? Is this addressed to God, or is it not? If it be, is it right and fit to address to him words that are absolutely untrue, and to cry urgently for aid which is not required, and which He cannot possibly give? If it be not, is it decent to solemnly sing or read phrases seemingly addressed to God, but really not intended to be noticed by him, phrases which use His name as though an appeal to Him were seriously made? It cannot be healthy to juggle thus with words, and to make emotional prayers which are utterly devoid of all meaning. Some devout persons talk very freely about the wicked-

ness of blasphemy, but is not that kind of game with God, in wailings which are devoid of reality, appeals not intended to be answered, a far more real blasphemy in the mouth of any one who believes in Him as a hearer of prayer, than the so-called blasphemy of those who distinctly assert that to them the popular and traditional "God" is a phantom, and that they see no reason to believe in His existence? Passing from this graver aspect of the use of the Psalter as a congregational song-book, we notice how purely comic many of the psalms would appear to us, had not the habit-fashion of our lives accustomed us to repeat them in a parrot-like manner, without attaching the smallest meaning to the words so glibly recited. "Every night wash I my bed and water my couch with my tears" (Ps. vi.), is sung innocently by laughing maiden and merry youth, the bright current of whose life is undimmed by the shadow of grief. "Bring unto the Lord, O ye mighty, bring young rams unto the Lord" (Ps. xxix.), is solemnly read out by the country clergyman, who would be beyond measure astonished if his direction were complied with. There we find the congregation making the certainly untrue assertion: "Moab is my wash-pot; over Edom will I cast out my shoe; Philistia, be thou glad of me." (Ps. lx.) At another time they cry out, "O clap your hands together, all ye people" (Ps. xlvii.); they speak of processions which have no existence, "The singers go before, the minstrels follow after, in the midst are the damsels playing on the timbrels." (Ps. lxxviii.) Another phase of this Psalter, which is offensive rather than comic, is the habit of swearing and cursing which pervades it; we find Christians, who are bidden to love their enemies, and to bless them that curse them, pouring out curses of the most fearful character, and displaying the most reckless hatred: "The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance; he shall wash his footsteps in the blood of the

ungodly." (Ps. lviii.) "Let them fall from one wickedness into another, and not come into Thy righteousness (Ps. lxix.);" a nice prayer, truly, for one man to pray for his brother man, to a holy God who is supposed to desire righteousness in man. Then there is that fearful imprecation in Psalm cix., too long to quote, where the vindictive and cruel anger not only curses the offender himself, but passes on to his children, "Let there be no man to pity him, nor to have compassion upon his fatherless children." Of course people do not really mean any of these terrible things which they repeat day after day; humanity is too noble to wish to draw down such curses from heaven, the people have outgrown the bad spirit of that cruel age when the Psalter was written, and their hearts have grown more loving; but surely it is not well that men and women should stand on a lower level in their prayers than in their lives; surely the moments, which ought to be the noblest, should not be passed in using language which the speakers would be ashamed of in their daily lives; surely the worship of the Ideal should not be degraded below the practice of the Real, or the notion of God be less lofty than the life of man. By making their worship an unreality, by being less than true in their religious feelings, by using words they do not mean, and by pretending emotions they do not experience, people become trained into insincerity, and lose that rare and beautiful virtue of instinctive and thorough honesty. When the prayer does not echo the yearning of the heart, then the habit grows of not making the word really the representative of the thought, of not making the feeling the measure of the expression. Much of the cant of the day, much of the social insincerity, much of the prevalent unreality, may be laid at the door of this crime of the Churches, of making men speak words which are meaningless to the speaker, and of teaching them to be untrue in the moments which should be the truest

and the purest. At another time, we might impeach prayer as a whole; we might argue against it, either as opposed to the unchangeableness and the wisdom of God, if a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God be believed in, or as utterly futile, and proved worthless by experience. But here we only plead for sincerity in prayer, wherever prayer is practised; we only urge that at least the prayer shall be sincere, and that the lips shall obey the heart.

Exactly the same objection applies to the "Canticles," which, in modern lips, are absolutely devoid of sense. What meaning has the "song of the blessed Virgin Mary" from an ordinary English congregation; why should English people talk about God promising His mercy "to our forefathers, Abraham, and his seed for ever," when Abraham is not their forefather at all? Why should they ask God to let them "depart in peace," when they have not the smallest desire to depart at all, and why should they assert to Him that they "have seen Thy salvation," when they have seen nothing of the kind? For the perpetually recurring *Gloria*, one cannot help wondering what it means; when was "the beginning," and is the "it" which was at that period, the "glory" which is wished to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; further, what is the good of wishing glory to Him—or to Them—if He—or They—have always had, and always will have it? When we have heard a congregation reciting the Creed, we have sometimes wondered what meaning they attached to it. "The maker of heaven and earth." Do people ever try to carry the mind back to the time before this "making," and realise the period when nothing existed? Is it possible to imagine things coming into existence, "something" emerging from where before "nothing" was? And then Jesus, the only Son, conceived by the Holy Ghost, who proceeds from Himself, and son, therefore, not of "the Father," but of that spirit

which only exists in and through "the Father and the Son." Again, how can a "spirit" conceive a material body? If the whole affair be miraculous, why try to compromise matters with nature, by making this kind of pseudo-father? Surely it would be simpler to leave it a complete miracle, and let the Virgin remain the solitary parent. Except for making the story match better with the elder Greek mythology, there is no need to introduce a god-parent in the affair; a child without a father is no more remarkable than a mother who remains a virgin. This attempt at reasonableness only makes the whole more outrageously unnatural, and provokes criticism which would be better avoided. A God, who suffered, was crucified, dead, buried, who rose and ascended, is a complete enigma to us. Could He, the impassive, suffer? could He, the intangible, be crucified? could He, the immortal, die? could He, the omnipresent, be buried in one spot of earth, rise from it, and ascend to some place where He was not the moment before? What kind of God is this who is to "come again" to a place where He is not now? If the answer be, that all this refers to the manhood of Jesus, then we inquire, "Is Christ divided?" if He be one God with the Father, then all He did was done by the Father as much as by Himself; if He did it only as man, then God did not come from heaven to save men; then this is not a divine sacrifice at all; then, a simple man cannot have made an atonement for the sin of the world. And where is "the right hand" of Almighty God? Is Jesus sitting at the right hand of a pure spirit, who has neither body nor parts? and, since He is one with God, is He sitting at his own right hand? Such questions as these are called blasphemous; but we fling back the charge of blasphemy on those who try to compel us to recite a creed so absurd. We decline to repeat words which convey to us no meaning, and not ours the fault, if any inquiry

into the meaning produce dilemmas so inconvenient to the orthodox. We are also required to believe in "the" Holy Catholic Church, but we know of no such body. Catholic means universal, and there is no universal church: to believe in that which does not exist would, indeed, be faith without sight. There is the Orthodox Church, but that is anathematised by the Roman; there is the Roman Church, but that is the "scarlet whore of Babylon" in the eyes of the Protestant; there are the Protestant sects, but they are many and not one, a multiformity in disunity. We are asked to acknowledge a "Communion of Saints," and we see those who severally call themselves saints excommunicating each the other: in a "forgiveness of sins," but Nature tells us of no forgiveness, and we find suffering invariably following on the disregard of law; in a "resurrection of the body," but we know that the body decays, that its gases and its juices are transmuted in the alembic of Nature into new modes of existence; in a "life everlasting," when the dark veil of ignorance envelopes the "Beyond the tomb." Only the thoughtless can repeat the creed; only the ignorant cannot see the impossibilities it professes to believe.

The two Collects, which are different in evening prayer to those used in the morning office, call for no special remark, save that they—in common with all prayers—make no practical difference in human life. The devout Christian is no more defended from "all perils and dangers of this night," than is the most careless atheist; wisely, also, does the Christian, having prayed his prayer, walk carefully round his house, and examine the bolts and bars, mindful that these commonplace defences are more likely to be efficacious against burglars than the protecting arm of the Most High.

The remainder of the service is the same as that used in the morning, so calls for no further remark.

If only people would take the trouble of *thinking* about their religion; if only they could be led, or even provoked, into trying to realise that which they say they believe, then the foundations of the popular religion would rapidly be undermined, and the banner of Free Thought would soon float proudly over the crumbling ruins of that which was once a Church.

THE LITANY.

The Litany has a fault which runs throughout the Prayer-Book, that "vain repetition" which, according to the Gospel, was denounced by Jesus of Nazareth; the refrain of "Good Lord, deliver us," and "We beseech Thee to hear us, good Lord," recurs with wearisome reiteration, and is repeated monotonously by the congregation, few of whom, probably, would know from what they were requesting deliverance, if the clergyman were to stop and ask so unexpected a question. Gods the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are severally besought to have mercy upon the miserable sinners praying to them, and then the Trinity as a whole is asked to do the same. How far this separation is consistent with the unity of the Godhead, and whether, in praying to the Son, we do, or do not, implicitly pray to the Father, and *vice versa*, those only can tell us who understand the "mystery of the Holy Trinity." This preamble over, the remainder of the Litany is addressed to "God the Son," who is the "Good Lord" invoked throughout, in spite of His reproof to the young man who knelt to Him, calling Him "Good Master;" "why callest thou Me good?" Various dogmas are alluded to in the succeeding verses in which few educated people now retain any belief. How many really care to be delivered "from the crafts and assaults of the devil," or believe in the existence of the devil at all? He is one

of those phantoms that can only be found in the darkness, and which fade away when the sun arises. How many believe in the "everlasting damnation," of the same verse, or really consider themselves in the smallest danger of it? No one who believed in hell could pray to be delivered from it in careless accents, for the smallest chance of that awful doom would force a wail of terror from the lightest-hearted of the listeners. Is it consistent to ask Christ to deliver us from His wrath? if He loved men so much as to die for them, it seems as though a great change must have come over His mind since He ascended into heaven, if He really requires to be pressed so urgently not to "take vengeance," and to spare us and deliver us from His wrath. Which is right, the wrath or the love? for they are not compatible; and does God really like to see people crouching before Him in this fashion, praising His mercy while they tremble lest He should "break out" upon them? If we were inclined to be hypercritical we might suggest that the prayer to be delivered from "all uncharitableness" gives a melancholy proof of the inadequacy of prayer; the answer to it may be read weekly in the *Church Times* and the *Rock*, more especially in the clerical contributions. The other petitions are also curiously ineffectual; "from all false doctrine, heresy, and schism," is so manifestly accepted at the Throne of Grace in these rationalising days. Jesus is then adjured to deliver His petitioners by the memory of His days upon earth, and we get the ancient idea of an incarnate God, so common to all eastern religions, and the curious picture of a God who is born, circumcised, baptized, fasts, is tempted, suffers, dies, is buried, rises, ascends. How God can do all this remains a mystery, but these suffering, and then conquering gods are familiar to all readers of mythologies; we learn further, that God the Holy Ghost can come to a place where He was not previously,

although He is the infinite God, and is therefore omnipresent. Verily, it needs that our faith be great. Being delivered sufficiently, the congregation proceed to a number of additional petitions, the first of which is, unfortunately, as great a failure as the preceding ones, for it prays that the Church may be guided "in the right way;" and having regard to the multiplicity of Churches, each one of which goes doggedly in her own particular way, it is manifest that they can't all be right, as they are all different. Then follow prayers for the Royal Family and the Government, and a general request to "bless and keep all Thy people;" a request which is systematically disregarded. In these days of "bloated armaments" it is at least pleasant to dream in church of there being given "to all nations, unity, peace, and concord." The "pure affection" with which God's Word is received is also perfectly imaginary; those who do not believe it criticise and cavil; those who do believe it go to sleep over it. The last part of these verses seems designed simply to pray for everybody all round, and this being satisfactorily accomplished, we come across another trace of an ancient creed: "Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world;" this is a fragment of sun-worship, alluding to the sun-god, when, entering the sign of the Lamb, he bears away all the coldness and the darkness of the winter months, and gives life to the world. The remainder of the Litany is of the same painfully servile character as the earlier portions; God seems to be regarded as a fierce tyrant, longing to wreak His fury on mankind, and only withheld by incessant entreaties. All possible evils seem to be showering down on the congregation, and, if one closed one's eyes, one could imagine a sad-faced, care-worn, haggard group of Covenanters, or Huguenots, instead of the fashionable crowd that fills the pews; and when one hears them ask that they may be "hurt by no

persecutions," one is inclined to mutter grimly: "You are all safe, mother Church, and you are the persecutor, not the persecuted." The service concludes with the same unreal cant about afflictions and infirmities, till one could wish almost to hear something of the style of observation made by an angry nurse to a tiresome child: "If you don't stop crying this minute, I will give you something to cry for." If men would only be as real inside the church as they are outside; if they would think and mean what they say, this pitiful burlesque would speedily be put an end to, and they would no longer offer up that sacrifice of lying lips, which are said to be "an abomination to the Lord."

PRAYERS AND THANKSGIVINGS UPON SEVERAL OCCASIONS.

These special prayers are, perhaps, on the whole, the most childish of all the childish prayers in the Church-book before us. A prayer "for rain;" a prayer "for fair weather:" it is almost too late to argue seriously against prayers like these, except that uneducated people do still believe that God regulates the weather, day by day, and may be influenced in His arrangements by the prayer of some weather-critic below. Yet it is a literal fact that storm-signals fly before the approaching storm, and prepare people for its coming, so that when it sweeps across our seas the vessels are safely in port, which otherwise would have sunk beneath its fury; meteorology is progressing day by day, and is becoming more and more perfect, but this science—as all other science—would be impossible if God could be influenced by prayer; a storm-signal would be needless if prayer could stay the storm, and would be unreliable if a prayer could suddenly, in mid-ocean, check the course of the

tempest. Science is only possible when it is admitted that "God works by laws," *i.e.*, that His working at all need not be taken into account. The laws of weather are as unchangeable as all other natural laws, for laws are nothing more than the ascertained sequence of events; not until that sequence has been found by long observation to be invariable, does the sequence receive the title of "a law." As the weather of to-day is the result of the weather of countless yesterdays, the only way in which prayers for change can be effectual is that God should change the whole weather of the past, and so let fresh causes bring about fresh results; but this seems a rather large prayer, to say the least of it, and might, by the carnal mind, be considered as somewhat presumptuous. In the prayers "in the time of dearth and famine" we find the old barbarous notion that men's moral sins are punished by physical "visitations of God," and that God's blessing will give plenty in the place of dearth: if men work hard they will get more than if they pray hard, and even long ago in Eden God could not make his plants grow, because "there was not a man to till the ground;" at least, so says the Bible. The prayer "in the time of war," is strikingly beautiful, begging the All-Father to abate the pride, assuage the malice, and confound the devices of some of His children for the advantage of the others. The "most religious and gracious" Sovereign recommended to the care of God has been known to be such a king as George IV., but yet clergy and people went on day after day speaking of him thus to a God who "searcheth the hearts." A quaint old Prayer-Book remarks upon this prayer for the High Court of Parliament, that the "right disposing of the hearts of legislators proceeds from God," and that "both disbelief and ignorance must have made fearful progress where this principle is not recognised." In these latter days we fear that disbelief and

ignorance of this kind *have* made very considerable progress. The Thanksgivings run side by side with the prayers in subjects, and are therefore open to the same criticisms. None of these prayers or praises can be defended by reason or by argument; reason shows us their utter folly, and their complete uselessness. Is it wise to persist in forcing into people's lips words which have lost all their meaning, and which the people, if they trouble themselves to think about them at all, at once recognise as false? All danger in progress lies in the obstinate maintenance of things which have outlived their age; just as a stream which flows peacefully on, spreading plenty and fertility in its course, and growing naturally wider and fuller, will—if dammed up too much—burst at length through the dam, and rush forward as a torrent, bearing destruction and ruin in its course; so will gradual and gentle reform in ancient habits change all that needs changing, without abrupt alterations, letting the stream of thought grow wider and fuller; but if all Reform be delayed, if all change be forbidden, if the dam of prejudice, of custom, of habit, bar the stream too long, then thought hurls it down with the crash of revolution, and many a thing is lost in the swirling torrent which might have remained long, and might have beautified human life. Few things call more loudly for Reform than our hitherto loudly-boasted Reformation.