

a state in which they could be bullied by their superiors, as liberal Romanists have been in France. But until there is some chance of the Bishops offering to take upon themselves the responsibility to the laity of keeping the clergy in order out of their own resources, we need not further discuss this alternative.



ART. IV.—THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS;

OR, THE EXHORTATION AT THE COMMENCEMENT OF MORNING AND EVENING PRAYER.

THE frequent repetition of any passage may produce two very opposite effects on the mind. It may lead to such an intimate acquaintance with both the detail and the spirit of the passage as we shall never gain by a single hearing; or it may produce such a habit of unthoughtful listening as will lead us never to give any serious attention to the real meaning of the words. We have a most remarkable illustration of this latter tendency in our use of the Address at the commencement of Morning and Evening Prayer. We have all heard it thousands of times, and we are all in the habit of standing up respectfully while it is read Sunday after Sunday, and in some cases day after day, at church; but it is a question whether out of the multitude of either readers or hearers there are very many who have given any very careful attention to its meaning. It is generally supposed to be an introductory address to the public worship of the day—something, that is, which may prepare the mind for the various services in which we are about to engage; so that it may possibly appear to some to be an act of great presumption if I venture to suggest that it is nothing of the kind, and that it was introduced into our Prayer-Book for a wholly different purpose.

To prove my point let us first recall the history of its introduction. In the Prayer-Book of A.D. 1549 the morning and evening services commenced with the Lord's Prayer, and there was no public confession of sin. I fear, therefore, that we must give up the beautiful theory that our services have been constructed as one harmonious whole, beginning with confession of sins and ending with thanksgiving; for until A.D. 1552 there was no separate act of confession in either the morning or evening services. The reason was that until that time the Church of England had taken no decided line on the subject. Our Reformers had not fully emerged from Popery, and the old practice of auricular

confession still lingered amongst them. Thus in the Communion Service of A.D. 1549 we find the following passage:—

If there be any of you whose conscience is troubled and grieved in any thing, lacking comfort or counsel, let him come to me or to some other discreet and learned priest, taught in the law of God, and confess and open his sin and grief secretly, that he may receive such ghostly counsel, advice, and comfort that his conscience may be relieved, and that of us (as of the ministers of God and of the Church) he may receive comfort and absolution, to the satisfaction of his mind, and avoiding all scruple and doubtfulness; requiring such as shall be satisfied with a general confession not to be offended with them that do use, to their further satisfying, the auricular and secret confession to the priest; nor those also which think needful or convenient, for the quietness of their own consciences, particularly to open their sins to the priest, to be offended with them that are satisfied with their humble confession to God and the general confession to the Church.

But the three years that followed A.D. 1549 were years of most important progress, and accordingly in the Prayer-Book of A.D. 1552 two great changes were introduced.

In the first place the passage in the Communion Service was materially altered. Instead of coming to "a discreet and learned priest" the person with a grieved and troubled conscience was invited, as he still is, to come "to some discreet and learned minister of God's Word;" and instead of being recommended to confess and open his sin and grief secretly, he is invited simply to "open his grief," and that without any reference to secrecy; while the latter part of the passage, which requires that no offence should be taken at the use of auricular and secret confession to the priest, was struck out altogether.

From these changes it appears that in the course of the three years a great change had taken place in the mind of the Church of England. The system of auricular confession to a priest had been abandoned, and public confession was recommended in its place. If people were in spiritual anxiety they were invited to go to a minister of God's Word, "that by the ministry of God's Holy Word" they might "receive the benefit of absolution, together with ghostly counsel and advice;" but the practice of auricular confession to a priest was no longer recommended, or even regarded as a matter of indifference.

Up to that date, however, there was no form of public confession in the daily prayers, and in order to carry out the change of opinion it became necessary that a new form should be prepared. Thus at the same time that the Reformers expunged from the Communion Service the passage which recommended the non-condemnation of auricular confession, they introduced the public Confession now standing at the commencement of our daily prayer, and they called it "general" in contradistinction to "auricular."

But they did not place it there alone. They followed it, as we should have expected them to do, by the Absolution; and, more than that, they also introduced a series of texts on the subject of repentance and confession, and then added this short address to justify the course they were adopting.

Thus the one object of the "Dearly Beloved," or Introductory Address, is to show that public worship is the chief occasion for the confession of sin. I am well aware that in the latter part of it mention is made of four of the other parts of public worship—viz., thanksgiving, praise, the hearing of God's Word, and prayer—but a very slight attention to the passage is sufficient to prove that they are not mentioned with the view of preparing our minds to take a part in them, but simply to show that there is no time so suitable for the confession of sin as when we are uniting in those other parts of public worship. The sense of the Address would not be in the least changed if, instead of making any particular allusion to thanksgiving, &c., the writers had written "Yet ought we most chiefly so to do, when we assemble and meet together for the various acts of public worship," for the leading object of the Address is to declare that public worship is the chief occasion for the confession of sin.

That this is the true purport of the passage is confirmed by the fact, that in the confession the minister is identified with the people. When he invites them to confess his language is, "Accompany me," and when he leads them in their confession, he does not sit like a priest in the confessional, or even stand while the congregation kneel, as if they were confessing before him; but he is directed to kneel with them, so that the whole body, minister and congregation together, may kneel before God in the humble, united, and public acknowledgment of sin. With this the Absolution is in perfect harmony, for in it the minister disclaims for himself anything approaching to judicial authority. All that he claims for his office is the power and commandment to declare and pronounce; while he distinctly teaches that it rests with God Himself to decide and bestow; as in the words, "He pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent and unfeignedly believe His holy Gospel."

Thus the four passages inserted A.D. 1552 all hang together. The texts teach the duty of confession; the Address declares that it should be a part of public worship. The Confession is the Church's public substitute for that which had before been secret and auricular, and the Absolution expresses her decision in favour of a declaratory absolution by a minister as against a judicial absolution by a priest.

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