

CONGREGATIONAL WORSHIP.

BY

A. J. Gordon,
Pastor of the Clarendon-Street Church, Boston.

Entered according to the Act of Congress, in the year
1874, by

YOUNG AND BARTLETT,

In the Office of the Librarian of Congress, at Washington.

BOSTON:
YOUNG AND BARTLETT,

26 School Street.

Boston:
Stereotyped and Printed By
Rand, Avery, & Co.

PREFACE

—·—

The question has been seriously resting on the author's mind for a long time, whether it is not possible to secure a more general participation of the people in our Lord's-day worship. This question has been suggested by various facts, such as the non-attendance of the great majority of the children and young people of the Sunday school upon the services of the church; the tendency on the part of some to fall into churches which use a liturgy, simply on the ground that they enjoy taking part in the services; and, most of all, the almost total lack in many of our churches of anything that can be properly called worship on the part of the people

With not the slightest sympathy with ritualism, and yet with a strong conviction that we have been tending entirely in that direction in allowing our praise to be rendered vicariously by quartet choirs, and our praying to be done so largely for us by the minister, instead of joining in it ourselves, we have asked what scriptural and reasonable methods could be found to popularize our worship, and save it from this tendency to exclusiveness. The sermons contained in this volume are an attempt towards answering this question. It is not claimed that they

furnish an exhaustive answer, but that they simply indicate a few desirable reforms. Nor does the book profess to be in any sense *a treatise* on the subject of worship. It is simply a series of five practical discourses preached on the successive Sunday afternoons to a Baptist congregation, and now, in answer to many requests, printed substantially as they were delivered.

If, with the extreme reluctance which many cherish to admit changes into our traditional form of worship, some may look with suspicion upon the one or two of the reforms here proposed, lest they should seem to tend to formalism, the author only asks a candid attention to what he has written, assured that the reader will be convinced that his aim is to check precisely this tendency by pointing out some ways through which the people may come into larger cooperation in the Sabbath worship, and so render it more popular and congregational, and less ministerial and exclusive.

If in any degree this little volume shall conduce to the honor of God, by encouraging his people to a more hearty and unanimous participation in his praise, the end of its publication will have been answered.

Boston, Dec. 15, 1874.

CONTENTS.



CHAPTER I.

WORSHIP. 7

CHAPTER II.

RESPONSIVE READING. 36

CHAPTER III.

CONGREGATIONAL SINGING58

CHAPTER IV.

THE WORSHIP OF GIVING75

CHAPTER V.

CONGREGATIONAL AMEN 95

CONGREGATIONAL WORSHIP.

CHAPTER I.

WORSHIP.

“It is written Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Matt. 4:10

There are two elements in our public Lord's service; vis., worship and preaching. The one of these has for its end the adoration of God, and the other the blessing of man. Which of these ends is primary will appear in the answer which we give to the question, Which is the first commandment, - “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God;” or, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself? And yet there need be no comparison made between these duties; since, in the purpose of God, they are so co-related, that if, in our hearts are right, whatever excess of attention we bestow on one accrues inevitably to the honor of the other. Like two connected columns of

water, which so exactly balance each other, that whatever you add to the one is distributed to the other, and thus their perfect equilibrium maintained, so love to God and love to man run together, and depend upon each other in such way, that, in a truly devoted service, they constantly tend to mutual increase. We need not be too greatly alarmed, therefore, at the charge of the ritualist, that “the vice of Puritanism is an excess of preaching over worship.” We must acknowledge the disproportion. But, while preaching aims at the benefit of man, its certain outcome, if it be scriptural and spiritual, is the glory of God. If by the regenerative power of the truth, we can open dumb lips, and cause the heart of the sinner to pray, and bless the Lord, we may bring a greater revenue of praise to our Saviour, and to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, than though we directed our whole energy to praying and adorning and worshipping. And we must turn back the charge, and assert, that the vice of ritualism is its deficiency in preaching. Too often is it found dealing with lost souls by prayers and

sacraments and litanies and prostrations, which it ought to be closing in with them in a heart to heart encounter, telling them, in honest Saxon speech, that, unless they believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, they are condemned, and beseeching them, I Christ's stead, to be reconciled to God. No: it is not that we puritans need to preach less, but to worship more and better, - - to worship better that we may preach better. For the worship of God, if it be genuine, is the highest stimulant and preparation for proclaiming the word of God. Go back to the beginning of the Christian Church, and mark the steps by which the apostles enter into that "great power: with which they "gave witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus." Instantly upon the ascension of Christ the record begins "And they *worshipped* him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; *and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God.*" And when we add to this account from Luke's Gospel the record I the Acts, of that entrance into the upper-room, and the prolonged continuance, with one accord, in prayer and supplication, we are not at a loss to

Understand the tremendous boldness and intensity of the first apostolic preaching that followed. It had its inspiration in the unanimous and prevailing worship that preceded it. Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost was born not of his own intense soul merely, kindled by the Holy Spirit: it spring from the energized and energizing spirituality of the whole church. And as it was in the beginning, so it must be now, if the word of God is to be in "demonstration of the Spirit and power." The worship must lift the word, and sing its message. The preacher's sermon must be environed by the people's prayers. The whole body of Christ must gather up its energy, and throw it into the arm that wields "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

There need be no comparison between the two elements of public service, much less any disparagement of either. There ought to be the in tensest and most masterly co-operation between them, -- the worship that is directed to God carried to its highest pitch of power,

In order that it may energize the preaching that is directed to man.

Regarding the text as enjoining a solemn duty, since words are in the form of a positive command, "*Thou shalt* worship, and a duty of permanent obligation, since "*it is written*" in that Word of God which cannot pass away, I wish to consider,

I. *The meaning and nature of worship.*

The word signifies homage, or adoration; and the act is one that has direct and exclusive reference to God. The very attitude of the worshipper indicates this, as we catch glimpses here and there of his adoration in the ancient service. "I will worship *toward thy holy temple,*" said David, when God dwelt in Zion. "*And they fell down and worshipped him,*" it is said of the wise men, when, by the incarnation, God had come down to make his temple in the body of the infant Jesus, who then reposed in the cradle at Bethlehem. "And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth forever," we are told after that the God-man is set down again at the right hand of the Majesty on High.

In other words, were God is, whether in the shrine of the temple, or in the tabernacle of flesh, or on the throne of glory, thither the worshippers steadfastly set their faces in homage and adoration. And since attitudes are but the symbols of spiritual states, how much we learn from these illustrations! Nothing that is not directed to God is worship. The soul that turns itself toward the Most High, with only the thought of receiving mercy, which it make no offering of thanksgiving, does not worship. The prayer that lifts to God only the empty cup of spiritual desire, while it swings no censer of adoring homage before his throne, is not worship. The thanksgiving, even if it only fixes the eye upon the blessing and bounty of the offerer, instead of being directed in self-forgetful gratitude upon the infinite Giver, is not worship. Worship in its highest form, is absolutely self-forgetful. The eye is open, and the spirit is intensely kindled; but it is God that fills the whole horizon of thought and reflections. All personal states and feelings and desires are swallowed up in the thought of his glory; and

The cry is, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.”

Now, if you think of it in this light, you will see that Christian faith is the underlying principle of worship, since it consists simply in *looking unto Jesus*.” In perfect vision the eye is unconscious of its sight, and equally unconscious of the limpid atmosphere which is the medium of its sight. It is wholly taken up with the object of its contemplation. And faith, which is the eye of the soul, when it forgets itself, and all its phases and feelings, and is completely absorbed with the person of Jesus, the Lamb of God, reaches its highest perfection, and hence becomes the truest form of homage to Christ, and of blessing to the worshipper. Do we not find an exquisite illustration of this idea in that colloquy of the woman of Canaan with Christ? Her prayer seems not to have found its answer till her faith had passed from mere importunate desire for the help of Christ, to adoring reverence of the person of Christ. For, when in grievous agony at her daughter’s case, she only cried, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou *Son of David*,” he answered her not a word; but when, as though having caught a sudden glimpse of his glory as the Lord from heaven “she came and *worshipped* him saying, *Lord help me*,” her faith was almost instantly crowned with its reward. And so I think that always there is worship at the heard and core of

true faith, an adoring contemplation of the attributes and offices and works and person of God in Jesus Christ. If, therefore, we have the spirit of true worshippers, we shall not come to the house of the Lord merely as beggars asking alms, but as subjects of the King of kings, bringing tribute to our Lord. And if our faith be true, it will turn all the ordinances and appointments of God’s house into means to this end. Our prayers will be the glowing vehicles of praise and thanksgiving; our sacraments will be a vivid picture-writing, in which we shall thankfully acknowledge to Christ the glory of his sufferings and the greatness of his redemption; and our hymns will be such tributes of praise as will make us forget even the beauty of melodious sounds that minister to the ear, in the contemplation of that beauty of holiness

which they celebrate before the Lord. Oh! How much we need to study the uses of worship, that in our spiritual tempers, in vocal utterances, and in our bodily postures, we may forego mere selfish ease and pleasure, and give ourselves to the service of magnifying the Lord, and joining with angels in heaven and the redeemed in paradise, to praise and bless him forever.

We have seen that faith is an underlying principle of worship; since it is contemplative in its nature, and Godward in its direction. There is also another idea equally fundamental, viz., the spirit of sacrifice. This was the great principle of the Hebrew service; and with the single difference, that it is self-sacrifice instead of the sacrifice of offerings that is now demanded, the requirement remains unchanged. And the direction of sacrifice is precisely the same as that of faith. It is the subjection of self to God; the magnifying of the Lord by casting at his feet that which is a most vital and intimate part of ourselves. Mark how constantly the gospel enjoins this: "I beseech you, therefore,

Brethren, by the mercies of God that *ye present your bodies a living sacrifice*, holy and acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." If we apply these words to worship, there is something more hinted at than mere ease and luxurious comfort in our bodily postures in the house of God. There is no merit in a painful attitude; there is no salvation in a reverent one. But if we would bring all our worship into subjection to the cross of Christ, there is a holy fitness in sacrificing mere easy and indolent indulgence of the flesh to the claims of reverence. There is a strong probability that the term worship, as used in the Scripture, always implied bodily obeisance in connection with spiritual adoration; that this was an inseparable part of it, as much as in the sacraments the outward symbols and elements are necessary to constitute them true ordinances. But there are some that have so used their liberty for an occasion to the flesh, that they look with scorn upon all reverent postures of the body in the church. To kneel down during public prayer, as Paul did with the elders of

Ephesus, would instantly be suspected by them as savoring of superstition and ritualism. It seems as though they measured the spirituality of their worship by the distance which it keeps from all bodily proprieties. To avoid the danger of formalism, they would erect informality in the worshippers' postures into an inexorable law of God's house. They are, *par excellence*, Bible Christians, who insist on doing all things as the apostles and primitive saints did; and so, instead of bowing down or standing with faces lifted heavenward during prayer, they sit still in their seats when the Most High is invoked, which apostles and primitive saints did not. Surely the outward and inward parts of man need not contradict each other. If you do truly prostrate your soul before God in adoration, your outward man will tend inevitably to follow. It is not necessary to withhold all homage of the body from God in order to be sure of worshipping him in spirit. Nay, let the demands of ease be denied; let the oppositions of pride be slain upon the altar; let the reluctance of stubborn habit be bound as with sacrificial cords

to the requirements of God. Let our self-abasement before Jehovah appear in our acts, as well as in our professions. Why should we think it honoring to God not to do at all, because some in the church of Christ have overdone in this matter? And when the summons of the word comes to us, "Oh, come, let us worship, and bow down," why should we sit immovably and self-complacently in our seats, meeting all the requirements to the contrary with the answer, "We are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit . . . and have no confidence in the flesh"?

The same law of self-sacrifice that applies to the prostration of our bodies before God, applies also to the offering of our lips. "By him, therefore, let us offer *the sacrifice of praise* to God continually; that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name." Mark carefully this expression, - "*sacrifice of praise.*" How it strikes at the idea of mere self-indulgence in the service of song! How it stamps with the brand of sacrilege our modern habit of regaling our ears with choice dainties of musical performance,

and calling it worship! To whom was the sacrifice offered of old? – to the people, or to God? I need not answer the question. To whom is the sacrifice of praise presented in many of our modern sanctuaries to-day? To the people, if the truth is told. It is fitted up to satisfy their taste, the incense of its melody wafted towards their ears. It finds its end in ministering to their pleasure. They sit down and listen to it exactly as though its whole aim and end were their delectation. I confess that when I consider the great original design of worship. – that from beginning to end it was directed to God, and to God only; that the slightest turning away from him was esteemed idolatry and sacrilege, - the habit of directing any part of Christian worship to the people is incongruous beyond expression. And when I consider that sacred song is the very highest and most lofty kind of worship, the idea of doing it for the people, and of the people sitting down to be sung to is grotesque, that the Devil, whose great delight seems to be to turn worship away from God, must rejoice at the perversion.

And then how much more is implied in the term “sacrifice of praise,” than the fact that it should be directed to God and to him exclusively! It ought to be the most perfect offering possible, without blemish or defect. It ought to be costly. – “Neither will I offer unto the Lord my God of that which did cost me nothing;” – but costly in the sense that it lays hold of a personal consecration, and exacts a personal surrender. God would not have been pleased if the Israelite had gone to his neighbor’s flock for a lamb, because, forsooth, he might find one there that was whiter and more comely. And neither will Christ be pleased now, if we borrow another’s voice to utter our praises for his redeeming love, however exquisite and beautiful that voice may be. The offering must be taken out of the flock which he purchased with his own blood. “Let us offer the *sacrifice* of praise; that is, the *fruit of our lips.*” And such an offering will often be more costly than any contribution of silver or gold. It will lay hold of our religious consecration; it will demand the crucifixion of that pride which would prompt us to withhold

our offering because our voice is not so good as our neighbor's; it will constrain us to surrender mere self-indulgence to the claims of worship, and the delights of the ear to the ardor of the heart; it will, in fine, compel us to forgo every unsanctified offering, however beautiful, and bring only that upon which we can write "holiness unto the Lord." And the idea of sacrifice will extend to the very thoughts and intents of the heart when we come before the Lord. All will look toward God, - the inward frames and the outward forms, the silence of our meditation, and the words of our praise. The thought of his infinite claim upon our heart will be supreme, leading us to acknowledge him by the dedication of ourselves, by the chastening of our tempers, by the slaying of our inordinate desires, by the binding of our wills in true obedience, by the offering in our deepest souls of the sacrifice of a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart.

II. Having considered the meaning and nature of worship, I wish to consider, secondly, who, under the Christian dispensation, are the *agents and offerers of worship*.

I reply, without a question, the congregation of believers. It is all theirs; no part of it can be delegated to others, or done vicariously for them. It is the supreme glory of the new dispensation that it sets the whole body of the faithful into that sanctuary where once only the ministry could go to offer praise and sacrifice to God. It is not that the priesthood has been abolished, as we sometimes say, and its distinction leveled. It is rather that the congregation of the faithful has been brought up. And all the servants of Christ anointed priests unto God. To the whole body of the saints Peter directed his words, when he said, "*Ye are a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.*" And just in proportion as we enter into this deep truth shall we disdain proxy-worship of every kind, as savoring of a ritualism from which Christ has forever delivered us.

Compare our position as Christian worshippers with our former state as Gentile aliens and strangers. Here is the holy of holies, the dwelling-place of God. Nearest to it stood

the high priest, though he was without the veil; next, the common priests; then the Levites, attendants on the priests, who were employed about the tabernacle; then the Jewish people, who were outside worshippers, as it is said in Luke, “the whole multitude of the people were praying *without* at the time of incense.” But even here, into this outer court, no Gentile could approach. He must stand afar off. He is a “stranger from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.”

Listen now, while Paul addresses us Gentiles: “But now, in Christ Jesus, *ye who sometimes were afar off are brought nigh by the blood of Christ.*” How nigh? Into the outer court, with the congregation of the Hebrews? Aye! nearer than that. Into the company of priests and Levites, in the holy place? Nearer than that. Into the place of the high priest, before the veil of the holiest? Nearer than that; for he could go into the holiest only once a year, and then not without blood. But oh, the mystery of grace! Oh, wonder of redeeming love! By the blood of Christ the way is opened

for us into the *holiest of all*. Having, therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say his flesh; and having a high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.”

Do you not see how thoroughly congregational the type of our worship is now? We have but one Priest above us, and we can have but one; and that is Christ. And we all, whatever our rank or station in the church, stand with him, by faith, in the very presence of God. Therefore let no man presume to do our praying, to offer our sacrifices, or to present our praises for us. If the minister leads the public intercessions, you, the people are bound to accompany him to the throne of grace, -- to make every word of his prayer hour own, by following it with your spiritual concurrence, and stamping it at the end with that Amen! which is the seal of your endorsement. For ye are

“priests unto God.” If others lead your singing, you are bound to resound every syllable of praise upon the heart-strings of your own devout affections, and, if you can, with the melody of your living voice. For ye are the Levites of the true temple. And if, in the order of worship, another bends his body, or lifts his hands in acts of solemn homage, you owe it to all the claims of holy fitness to attend him in the ministration, presenting your bodies before the Lord, since, as true priests of Jesus Christ you have had “your heart sprinkled from an evil conscience, and your bodies washed with pure water.”

Will you then, my brethren, bear in mind the marks of ritualism, - that carnal relapse into the methods and ordinances of an outworn worship, to which the church is ever tending? And will you frown on them as the re-beginnings of a bondage from which Christ has forever delivered you? Note these marks in the light of this scripture which I have placed before you, and be not deceived by prejudice or association. They are not found in the participation of the whole church in religious service, in their united

singing, in their unanimous and hearty responses to the prayer, in their mingling their voices in reading or chanting of the psalms, in their concerted bowing down in supplication. All these acts are popular and congregational. They tend to mingle and unify the various currents of devotion, and to prevent them from settling into any stagnant centres of exclusiveness. They keep the worship of the church distributed and equalized, and save it from clerical monopoly. They preserve and perpetuate that Magna Charta of grace, the community and equality of believers in Christ. We ought, therefore, to stand for them, and emphasize them as the very safeguards of our Christian liberty.

On the other hand, solitary and unattended prayers by the minister, at though he were a priest praying for the people, instead of a brother-worshipper praying with them; select and exclusive singing by a choir, as though they were a band of Levites to do the people’s praise, instead of leading them in songs of their own; chancel-rails or altar-enclosures, that seem to mark off some portion of the church as sacred,

and sequestered from the tread of common feet, when Christ has broken down all curtains and partitions between outer court and holy place; clerical vestments of every degree, which distinguish the minister from his flock, as though he belonged to a higher rank and priestly order, instead of being simply one of their number; the exalting of the Lord's supper into an awful sacrificial mystery, with which only consecrated and ministerial hands may deal, when it is only a simple feast of commemoration at which the humblest believer occupies the same position as the highest, -- all these things are signs and beginnings of ritualism. And through these avenues of custom, whether they open out of a Baptist meeting-house, or an Anglican cathedral, the way is easy to wider and wider departures from the simplicity that is in Christ.

Let me select from these particulars which I have enumerated, a single one; that which with us stands as the chief and central act of our worship. - the prayer. Hear the summons to this exercise, which is given in the epistle to the Hebrews: "Brethren . . . let us draw near." It is

not let *me* draw near in your behalf, as your minister and mouthpiece; but let *us* draw near. Of course the summons ought to be the same to-day, since the priesthood of believers in Christ is an unchangeable priesthood. Well, now, if the people simply sit still in their places during this exercise, without a single change of attitude, without a gesture of reverence, without an utterance of the voice, without a single amen at the end, do they not look more like Jews waiting without, than like purged Christian worshippers entering in before the throne of grace? And when the pastor stands up alone, without a sound or token of attendance with him on the part of the flock, and shuts his eyes, and so draws the curtain between himself and the congregation, and enters into solitude while he pleads with God, -- the first salutation that greets him on his return being the subdued strains of the organ, -- does he not look too much like the high priest entering within the veil, and ministering by himself, till the tinkling of the sacred bells announces his return to the waiting congregation?

Now brethren, whatever else we forget, let us not forget this: that prayer in our Lord's-day worship is *with* the church, and *by* the church, and not away from them, or on their behalf. Paul was a minister to the Gentiles, to preach reconciliation unto them, and as such he magnified his office; but he was not a minister *for* the Gentiles, to make priestly intercession for them. Here he occupied the same level with the whole body of believers, worshipping with them through the ministry of another, even Jesus, "the minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle." His office of minister was lost, so to speak, when he stood with his brethren in the attitude of worship. He prayed *with them*, we are told; and again, they prayed *with him*. But there was no difference in their standing before the throne. There are two orders in the ministry now – Jesus, the Great High Priest, and the whole body of washed and blood-sprinkled saints that constitute the holy priesthood. Therefore it becomes us, as servants of the church, to magnify the office of the minister of the true tabernacle by refusing to take upon

ourselves any priestly function for the people; and it becomes us equally to magnify the priesthood of all believers by refusing to stand in any place above them. Let us tell them that we dare not go alone before the Lord, lest we reverse the sin of Korah, and, instead of bringing in the unconsecrated, we should seem to keep back the true appointed priests of the new dispensation. Who of us does not feel that this is one of the crying evils of our worship, that for want of consecration, for want of trained and habitual co-operation on the part of the worshippers in our public service, the pastor cannot feel that the flock is with him. There are holy souls, a few, that step out and follow him before the throne. But the *people* do not accompany him. What if the whole body of believers heard each Lord's-day morning the call to consecrate themselves for holy service? What if they kept hours of preparation, as for a solemn personal ministry before the Lord? What if they were careful, with a holy strictness, to purify themselves, to put on their garments of consecration, and to light the fire in the censer of their hearts?

And what if, when the pastor rose to pray, they crowded round him with such pressure and vehemence of desire, with such intimacy of spiritual contact, with such intensity of bodily and mental sympathy, that they should be felt actually against the throne, would there not be a power in the worship that would, sometimes at least, make the people forget the eloquence of the sermon in the greater thought, "Lo! God was in this place."

III. Let us consider, thirdly, the *incitements and inspirations to worship* which we enjoy as Christians.

These are not found in any outward and visible appliances, but in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

To the Jewish believers, accustomed from childhood to all the splendor of the Hebrew ceremonial, the first Christian worship must have seemed painfully meagre. It had almost nothing outward and visible to signalize it. No temple, no priesthood, no altar, no incense. In an unconsecrated upper room, from whose windows perchance they looked out towards the

that had just received their Lord out of sight, they began their service. But is they wanted the outward forms, and symbols, how much they had of which the Jew knew nothing! They had beheld in that Jesus Christ, who had just been taken up from them, "the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his person." And now, as they lifted their eyes towards the upper sanctuary, they worshipped no unknown, unmanifested Deity, but one who had stood before them on the earth, and said, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father;" one whom they had heard, whom they had seen with their eyes, whom they had look upon and their hands had handled. Not like those other priests in yonder temple did they stand before the veil of the holiest, looking upon its blue and purple and scarlet, and fine-twined linen, and cunning work of cherubim, and dimly picturing to themselves the glory of the unseen and unapproachable God. They looked right through the veil into heaven itself, and saw the "glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." And more than this: they saw in the "Lamb as it had

been slain,” that stood in the midst of the throne, a token and pledge of God’s love, such as no Jew ever dreamed of. Brethren, do we realize the mighty incentives to worship we have in the simple knowledge and memory of Christ’s sufferings for us? “Do you want to worship?” asks the rationalist. “Then reflect on the love of Deity; behold in the singing of the birds, in the blooming of the flowers, in the pictured glories of the sunset sky, how great is the goodness and kindness of the All-Father.” Do you want to worship, O believer? Remember Christ. “God commendeth his love to us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” And all other commendations are feeble and of little weight compared with this. If we keep this blessed fact before us, we can worship anywhere and in any circumstances: yea, we cannot help worshipping; we shall be pressed in spirit and straitened in soul if we cannot utter aloud our joy and our homage. The love of Christ will constrain us with irresistible force.

Among all the inimitable pictures which have been drawn for us by the evangelists, is there

one that is more beautiful, and more worthy of the painter’s highest art, than that which describes the first meeting of the risen Lord with the two Marys? “Jesus met them in the way, saying, All hail. *And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.*” – That reverent intimacy of love, -- the adoration of the God chastening and exalting and sanctifying the affection for the man, -- the affection for the man softening and humanizing and subduing the adoration of the God. “They held him by the feet.” “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace.” Ay, twice beautiful now that those feet are scarred with the wounds of that cross by which he “came and preached peace to them which were afar off, and to them that were nigh”! “They held him by the feet.” What did they hold? The prints of those nails by which the handwriting of ordinances that was against us was fastened to the cross and blotted out, -- the very seals and credentials of our redemption. What wonder that they worshipped! Behold the God! Behold the man! So truly divine that the

Father said, in bringing him into the world,
“And let all the angels of God worship him.”
So truly human, that, though now ascended into
heaven itself, he is still revealed to us as “the
man Christ Jesus.”

With these words our text ringing in our
ears, “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God,
and him only shalt thou serve; and with the
remembrance in our minds that worship is the
acknowledgment of divine worthiness, can we
hesitate, as we stand before the person of Jesus
Christ, and remember his sufferings for us, to
say, “Thou art worthy, for thou was slain and
hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, and
made us kings and priests, and we shall reign on
the earth.” And as we remember that he is the
Good Shepherd who has laid down his life for
the sheep, must not that summons to adoration
have a meaning for us which it never had for
God’s ancient people?

“Oh, come, let us worship and bow down:
let us kneel before the Lord our Maker, for he is
our God; and we *are* the people of his pasture,
and the sheep of his hand.”

CHAPTER II.

RESPONSIVE READNG

“Speaking to yourselves in psalms.” – Eph. v. 19.

THE psalms have constituted the Church’s
book of worship in all ages. Here are the
loftiest songs of praise, and the deepest prayers
of confession; the truest exhibitions of the
character of God, and the most genuine
reflections of the experience of man. And
because the book touches thus thoroughly both
sides of worship, the objective and the
subjective, it must hold a permanent place, and
maintain a perennial freshness, in the services of
God’s house throughout all ages. God changes
not; and therefore, his people will continue to
celebrate his praise in the grant one hundredth
psalm, and never, till adoration ceases from the
earth, will that strain die out. “For the Lord is
good; and his mercy is everlasting; and his truth

endureth to all generations.” Man changes not and. Therefore, penitence and contrition will ever pour out their confessions in the words of that plaintive fifty-first psalm; and not until sin is abolished forever will this prayer of David the son of Jesse be ended.

It is not strange, therefore, that, while in the transition from Judaism to Christianity, the Church cast off the ancient ceremonial, she retained this ancient book of devotion. In the first celebration of the Lord’s supper, it was the psalms that furnished the sacramental hymn with which the feast was closed. (Matt. 26:30) In the sacrificial agony of the cross, when with strong crying and tears the Redeemer made his soul an offering for sin, it was in the language of psalms 2 (Matt. 22:43) that he uttered his dying prayer. In the midnight-worship of Paul and Silas at Philippi, when in the dungeon they prayed and sang praises to God, it was the psalms of David that furnished them their songs in the night. To both the Ephesian and the Colossian churches Paul makes exhortation to the use of psalms in their worship of God. And we know, that from that time onward to the present, the psalms have furnished the basis of religious worship, serving at once as the prayer-book and the hymn-book of the Christian Church.

Recognizing the place which the psalms have so universally held in the service of the

Church, let us ask, in the light of Scripture and of primitive worship, how we can most usefully employ them in our Lord’s-day worship? To this question I answer, --

I. By a congregational repetition of them: “Speaking to yourselves in psalms.” He is evidently an injunction to the Church, and not to the conductor of public worship merely. The words point so clearly to a congregational exercise, that a German commentator finds in them “one of the strongest indications of the universal priesthood of the first Christians.” This recitation, on the part of the people, might be in the form of singing, or in the form of reading. It matters not; for these acts are only variations of one and the same exercise. From the monotones of the ancient chant or recitation,

to the many tones of our modern singing, there is simply a modification by the introduction of melody and variety of sounds of one and the same exercise of "speaking." But simple congregational reading undoubtedly comes nearest to the primitive custom.

And we can see at once what a wise provision there is in this demand for audible repetition of the words of devotion on the part of the worshippers. Reading aloud brings into Exercise those two most powerful stimulants to an alert and wide-awake attention, --seeing and speaking.

How greatly the eye upon the written page helps to fix one's interest! Sight is a sort of mother-tongue to all the senses. So supreme is Her authority, that we are prone to bring the other senses to her tribunal, and to insist on translating the evidence of taste and touch and hearing into her dialect, before we will receive their testimony. "Oh! *taste* and *see* that the Lord is good." "*Handle* me, and *see* that it is I myself." Seeing thus the ultimate referee to which we bring the evidence of all the senses, and, as such, is the first and greatest ally of close and intelligent apprehension. And when

speech articulates what the eye has received, the incitement to interest has more than doubled above what could come from the mere hearing of the ear. For utterance in turn vivifies and re-enforces the thought that the eye has taken in from the open page. It is a maxim among teachers, that "one does not know a thing till he has told it." And there is truth in it. There is a vagueness and an undefinedness about wordless ideas. We try to pray mentally, and our ideas elude us. That "military discipline of thought" which well-ordered speech can give is wanting. Our thoughts break rank, and scatter. Our desires, instead of marching strong and steady battalion, desert us one by one, and leave us in a dreamy and undefinable vacancy of worship. Speech is like the body: when asleep, as in the letters of a printed page, it simply holds the idea in dormancy, as it were, to be wakened and drawn out by our attention to it; but weakened and drawn out by our attention to it; but when awake and moving in the articulations of the living voice, it reflects each mood and meaning of that idea, as the body does the soul. And so

the same divine wisdom that has ordained visible symbols as the expression of spiritual truth, has enjoined “speaking to ourselves in psalms” in the worship of God’s house, as well as “singing and making melody in our hearts unto the Lord.”

And there is also the incitement which comes from the blending of many voices in the same utterance. I do not say that ten men speaking together can always say a thing more powerfully than on man speaking alone. But when it is a question of worship, they undoubtedly can; for unanimity and concord are among its most vital elements. Hear the sound of a multitude, saying, “*Praise ye the Lord,*” is much more effective than the uttering of it by a single voice, as the march of an army is more impressive than the passing of a solitary soldier. In the descriptions of the worship of heaven, who does not feel instinctively the grandeur of the vast numbers, and the myriad voices which are represented as uniting in it. The “one hundred and forty-four thousand, and the voice, as the sound of many waters, singing the new song

before the throne;” “the great multitude, which no man could number, crying with a loud voice, and saying, salvation to our God.” In such descriptions as these we get an idea of the majesty and glory of the heavenly service which nothing can heighten.

Whether it be true or not physically, as has been asserted, that the striking and collision of sounds in the atmosphere can generate electricity, the spiritual fact is unquestionable. There is a marvelous magnetism in the blending and colliding of a multitude of voices in a great congregation. Nothing can compare with it as an incitement to religious enthusiasm; nothing can take the place of it as a means of stirring and maintaining a universal interest in public services. Now, concerted reading is the simplest form of vocal worship. Some may complain that they have not the voice for singing, and others, that they have not the training to follow the simplest melody of music. But none but the dumb, or utterly unlettered, can say that they cannot join in the audible reading of the psalms. Here, then, is an exercise, scriptural and

primitive in its character, that can enlist every worshipper; that can draw in every voice in the

assembly to swell and deepen the current of devotion.

II. The text warrants not only our reading congregationally, but *intercongregationally*, or *responsively*.

“Speaking to *one another* in psalms,” the exact translation of the words. There is the idea of reciprocal, or antiphonic worship in the language, as many suppose; and this supposition is very strongly borne out by the descriptions of the earliest Christian worship which have come down to us. Pliny, a Roman writer, describes, as early as 110 A.D., the services of the Christians, and says, among other things, that they were accustomed to “utter *responsively, among themselves*, a song of praise to Christ.”* Tertullian mentions that, in the second century, the Christians were wont to recite psalms at their love-feasts; and that pious husbands and wives *repeated them antiphonically*; that is, by *alternate responses*.**

* Donner, Person of Christ, p. 165

** *Vide* Tholuck on the Psalms: Introduction, p. 2

Hilary, Chrysostom, and Augustine testify that the psalms were sung or read by the whole congregation; that sometimes the assembly was divided into two parts, which read alternately; and sometimes the precentor lead off, and the congregation responded.* Basil writing in the fourth century, describes un very touching terms, the Lord’s-day worship in his time. “The people, rising early,” he says, “while it is yet night, come to the house of prayer, and then, with much labor and affliction and contrition and tears, make confession o their sins to God. When this is done, they rise from their prayers, and dispose themselves to psalmody: sometimes dividing themselves in two parts, *they answer one another in singing, or sing alternately*. After this, again they *permit one alone to begin the psalm, and the rest join in the close of every verse*; and thus, with variety of psalmody, they carry on the night, praying betwixt whiles, or intermingling prayers with their psalms.”

Such are some of the descriptions of the

- Tholuck on the Psalms.

earliest Christian worship. We might add many others. And no fact is more constantly testified to than the custom of responsive repetition of the psalms; and we can understand at once why such a practice came into vogue.

In the first place, many of the psalms seem to have been constructed for such use. Some of them are in the form of a dialogue, like the forty-sixth, where it is evident, that after the rehearsal by the leaders of the worship, of the strain beginning, "God is our refuge and strength," and "Come behold the works of the Lord," the people answered, anon, - "*The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.*"

The one hundred thirty-sixth psalm suggests a similar use. It reviews the mercies of God to the Hebrew people; and at each separate mention of the goodness of Jehovah, the refrain comes in, "*For his mercy endureth forever.*" This was evidently the people's response in audible consent to what had been spoken to them.

Then there is the parallelism, as it is called,

According to which all the psalms are constructed in the original, which adapts them most admirably for recitation, by two parties "alternately asking and responding, exhorting and confirming." In this arrangement each second member of the sentence forms a sort of modulated echo of that which has preceded it. There is just that variation or expansion of the preceding thought which would be natural in its repetition by a second party. It is the most perfect kind of iteration and reiteration of the same idea as between interlocutors.

"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness."

According to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions.

Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity.

And cleanse me from my sin.

For I acknowledge my transgressions.

And my sin is ever before me.

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean.

Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."

One has not conception of the felicitous charm which is given to the rendering of the psalms,

when employed in this manner between the minister and the congregation.*

And, again, we know that such had been the method of reciting the psalms in the Jewish worship, in which the early disciples had been trained. We might give many illustrations of this; but one will suffice. Imaging yourself present in the temple on the evening of the Passover. It is the hour of sacrifice. Along the court, up to the altar of burnt-offering, stand the priests, in two rows, holding their golden and silver bowls. A company of Israelites enter with their paschal lambs. Each slays his offering; and, as the blood is poured out, it is caught up on the bowls of the priests, and passed on to the altar. But all the while, as this passing, the paschal hymn is being sung. It is the Hallel, as it was called, comprising Psalms cxiii. to cxviii. Listen to it. The Levites lead, and the offerers respond, thus: --

The Levites. – “Praise ye the Lord.”

The People. – “Hallelu Jah (praise ye the Lord.)

- Note A.

The Levites. -- “Praise, O ye servants of the Lord.”

The People.— “Hallelu Jah.”

The Levites – “Blessed be the name of the Lord, from this time forth, and forevermore.”

The People. – “Hallelu Jah.”

And so they continued till they reached the middle of Psalm cxviii., when the people said, --
“Save now, I beseech thee, O Lord:
“O Lord, I beseech thee, send now prosperity.
“Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.”

Come on now to that evening when this Jewish feast passed into a Christian feast, and the paschal supper into the Lord’s supper. Christ, our Passover, is about to be slain for us. All the myriads of Hebrew offerings are not to find their fulfillment in the true Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world. The priests, the Levites, the altar, the animal victims, disappear. All that was ceremonial and typical recedes, and vanishes forever as Jesus now says, “This is my body,” – “this is my blood.” But the paschal hymn remains, -
-“And when they had sung a *psalm.*” – We know

what that psalm was. It was the same Hallel with which the pious Jew had kept for centuries the paschal ceremony. Why should it not remain? It had a meaning now, and henceforth, that it never had before. It contained such words as these: "The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me." "Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar," "The stone which the builders refused has become the headstone of the corner." What tender and glorious significance it had for Jesus and his disciples as they now repeated it. Did they sing it responsively, as had been the custom in the Jewish worship? We cannot tell, and it matters little. But we are astonished, as we pass over the worship of the long intervening Christian centuries, and are introduced at last, in vision, to hear the echoes of the same Hallel, as in a sublime antiphony, "the great voice of much people in heaven, answers, "*Alleluia*," at the announcement of the finished judgments of God.

"Salvation, and glory, and honor, and power, unto the Lord our God: For true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand,

And again they said, Alleluia

And the four and twenty elders, and the four beasts, fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying,

Amen; Alleluia.

And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great.

And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying,

Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

You see thus, the responsive recitation of the psalms was the constant and distinguishing peculiarity, both of the Hebrew and of the early Christian worship. It gave a vivacity and grandeur to that worship. Such as no solitary repetition could

approach. It made every man an active participant in the religious service. In great assemblies it added to the power of combined and accordant utterance, the stirring effect of grand reverberations. Like the mountains giving back the thunder-peal in a hundred answering echoes; so the great congregation replied, in scores of voices, to the word of God which had been spoken to them: "For his mercy endureth forever."

Without claiming now that these precedents of worship lay any positive obligation upon us, they do seem to lend a strong sanction to our use of a similar method of psalm-service, if we find it desirable. And you see, on a moment's reflections, how exactly it accords with the genius of our New-Testament worship. That worship is reciprocal, not exclusive; while in the ministry of preaching, the pastor has a special function to "feed the flock of God," in the ministry of worship, the whole body of believers are of the holy priesthood. There are not two orders here, --priest and people, --the one to pray, and the other to be prayed for; the one to teach, and the other to be taught; the one to receive

confessions, and the other to make confessions; the one to exhort, and the other to be exhorted. Nay all are priests here; called to mutual service, and ministering in an interrelated worship under Jesus, the great High Priest. How strikingly the exhortations to Christian service in the epistles confirm this assertion, *Pray one for another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs.* "Exhort one another daily." "Confess your faults one to another." All these injunctions point to a reciprocal service, and to a mutual ministration among believers. Therefore, when the pastor, or any other leader of public worship, reads from the psalms the solemn lessons and warnings and praises of God, and the people respond I answering lessons and warnings and praises, is there not a literal and most fitting compliance with the apostle's precept to the Colossians, "teaching and admonishing one another in psalms?"

Let me mention two or three reasons why I could wish to see this primitive and ancient usage revived in our Lord's-day worship.

1. It would be a most useful auxiliary to a more general participation of the people in our religious services. We are suffering more than we are aware of from passiveness and silence in our congregations. Stagnation is worse, if it were possible, that zealous formality. To utter what you do not feel, surely, is no more deplorable in God's house than both to feel nothing and to say nothing. Well, now, vocal utterance is confessedly a quickener and stimulant to feeling, as well as its vehicle. Stillness of the lips reacts in stillness and quiescence of the mind; but speech strikes back upon the thoughts and the emotions, and tends to stir the drowsy soul to action. Hence it is among my strongest convictions, that, in order to bring up our congregational worship to its maximum of power and spiritual interest, there must be the largest possible co-operation of the people in audible acts of worship. "Let *the people* praise thee. O God: let *all* the people praise thee." Let those who cannot guide their tongues in the melody of song, "take a psalm and come before the Lord." Let those who cannot follow the harmony of sweet

sounds, speak to one another in the simplest form of utterance. Silence is culpable here; for God gives to every one some power of expression. And as in nature all things use their voice obediently to his will, from the wailing monotone of the pines to the intricate melody of the birds, praising him who made them, so let all redeemed men, whether they have larger or smaller powers of utterance, refuse to keep silence before the Lord in the courts of his praise.

2. I am persuaded that this custom would help to enlist the children and youth more generally in our services. Now the great mass of them go from the Sunday school to their homes. We have largely lost our hold upon them, so far as their attendance upon the sanctuary is concerned. They come in flocks to the Sabbath-school concert, because there they are participants and not spectators. That wise and wakeful foresight which characterizes our Sabbath-school workers has long since taught them the value of responsive reading; so that while a few years since the practice was unknown, there is hardly a

school among us now that does not employ it. And this church of the juveniles is making tremendous advances. It has its ritual and hymnody and its various ministry, most skillfully and wisely adjusted to the wants of the youthful community which it serves. It is untrammelled by tradition, and hence has the flexibility and power of adaptation that is tending constantly to make it the most popular as well as the most useful of our Christian institutions. Unless we are prepared to give up our work entirely to it, and concede that the Sunday school is the children's church, and they cannot be expected to attend any other, let us keep pace with it in popularizing our worship, using all scriptural and sober means for making our Lord's-day exercises as attractive to the young as we seek to render them to the old, that so both "young men and maidens, old men and children," may unite with equal interest to serve and magnify the Lord in his house.

3. Lastly, I would urge the custom, because it seems to me that it would strongly help to restore to the exercise of public scripture reading that interest which might belong to it, but which it has so sadly failed to hold. Surely if any thing can break up this neglect, we ought to be eager to adopt it. And what would be a better cure, than for the people to read with the conductor of the worship?¹ Let us feel that all the senses and powers which we can enlist in this solemn exercise ought to be given to it. Let the eye then be fixed upon the written page; let the ear be attent to hear the Scripture from the lips of the

preacher; let the mouth recite it with fervor and distinctness and intelligence, and so by many witnesses let every word be established in our thoughts.

¹ Dr. Thomas J. Conant, than whom few men are better able to judge of the questions in the light of Scripture and primitive custom says, in writing on the subject to Rev. Dr. Budington, "I fully agree with you in your main position in regard to the propriety and utility of the responsive reading of the psalms in the public services of the sanctuary. I hope you will continue to urge the subject on the attention of churches and congregations. Of the propriety and utility of the practice no Christian disciple surely can have any doubt. *For many years I have been in the habit of saying that our mode of conducting the services of the sanctuary has banished God's word from his house.* The little that is read from the Bible is scarcely attended to, the congregation taking no part in it. Few take the Bible to the house of God, having little or no use for it there."

Do we believe that having ears we should hear when the preacher addresses us, and give good heed to his doctrine and his exhortation? Let us be careful that we give no less heed to the Word of God, lest we should break the least item in that threefold commandment: “Give attendance to *reading*, to exhortation, to doctrine.”

CHAPTER III

CONGREGATIONAL SINGING

“Be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.” –Eph. 5: 18, 19

The worship of song has generally been the measure and expression of the spirituality of the Church. We are not surprised, therefore, to find in the text the exhortation to sing, based on the prerequisite condition of being filled with the Spirit. For just in proportion as the indwelling life and power of the Holy Ghost is manifested in the believer and in the Church will there be the impulse and the inclination and the power to sing. Hence we are not unprepared to find that all the great reformations in the history of the church have been marked by signal revivals of Christian song.

It was so in the time of Luther. Those who with

him had burst the shackles of Papal superstition found that they could not utter their newly kindled zeal and enthusiasm in the frigid forms of the old Church. And so out of the very strife and conflict of the Reformation came forth new hymns –hymns, too, which for sublimity of expression and lyrical rhapsody of feeling have rarely been surpassed in any age. It is a notable fact that during the Reformation under Calvin, singing became so general a characteristic of its services that it was a synonym for Protestant heresy. And, in England, Wycliffe’s followers were named “Lollards,” as is supposed from a word signifying to sing or chant, in contempt of their characteristic habit of psalm-singing. A marked feature of the great Methodist movement under Whitefield and the Wesleys, was the fresh and spontaneous outburst of song. The old Moravian hymns, with their incomparable blending of love and melody, were sung anew by lips that had been touched by the Holy Spirit. In the great awakening which took place in New England in the time of Edwards, the same peculiarity is noticed.

That eminent preacher testifies, that in many of the towns which were visited with the refreshing, the religious fervor was so great, that the converts went singing in companies to and from the churches. And exactly the same fact has, in some cases, marked the recent great revival in Scotland. Bands of converts have been seen marching to the house of God on the Lord’s-day morning, singing, as the Jews were wont to do, as they went up to the temple, the exultant and grateful songs of their deliverance from captivity.¹

If, now, we were to put over against this class of facts, another, and an opposite class, as we could easily do, I think the conclusion would be inevitable, that eras of spiritual refreshing in the Church of Christ have generally been eras of revival in popular and congregational singing, and that, on the other hand, select and exclusive choir-singing has been the peculiar mark of religious declension.² It is not a question of taste or aesthetic gratification, therefore, but of religious life and spiritual earnestness.

¹ Note B.

² Note C.

“Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,” seems, in the text, to be made and inevitable consequent of being filled with the Spirit. This ought to be kept faithfully in mind. The impression is too common, that the church to listen, if it happens to be a choir that sings, or, if the congregation does the singing, to unite in it, or to keep silence, according to pleasure. Many seem to forget that there is any special religious obligation in the matter, --that singing like prayer, is a Divine gift, put into our hands to be used for the glory of God, by exalting and purifying those affections which he claims preeminently as his. Sacred song belongs to Christianity. Somehow it is inwrought with its best religious life. Somehow its abuses keep company with religious decadence, and its blessings go hand in hand with religious reformations. Somehow it loves best to build its nest in the heart of the Christ-like and the devout, and forsakes the soul of the careless and the godless.

I wish to urge two duties upon the members of the congregation, -- the duty of singing *audibly*, and the duty of singing *devotionally*.

1. The duty of singing audibly, “*speaking to one another*,” in the exact import of the words.

There is no silent singing here, no dumb music of the heart behind motionless and voiceless lips. To speak implies audible utterance; and here is a clear injunction to worship God with the lips and voice.

Now, there are two classes of offenders in this matter of the worship of song: viz., those who, having a good voice, do not sing with the heart, and those who, having a good heart, do not sing with the voice; and the latter is not the least culpable. For one who loves God and adores Jesus Christ, to sit silent when their praises are sung, keeping time to the melody only with the muffled beating of the heart, ought to be considered almost an affront to the Most High. It is urged, indeed, that one can sing with the spirit without the necessary use of vocal utterance. But singing implies thought and mediation; and few persons can think or meditate

consecutively, for a long time, without the help of language. Try to sing without utterance, and observe how your thoughts straggle off, and finally, before you know it, get beyond recall. Words are the channels and viaducts of thought; and without them the stream of devotion is always losing its way, either spreading out so thinly that it evaporates before it reaches its destination, or, falling into the mere spray of aimless meditation, it is lost. Hence, when one sings, he needs words to help him think God's thoughts after him. He needs *audible* words to quicken and kindle his devotion by the action of thought upon itself through the medium of hearing.

But it is not merely an individual and personal necessity. It is a demand that is laid upon us by the mutual obligations which worshippers hold to each other. And, therefore, we urge heart united congregational singing as a means of raising the aggregate devotion of the Christian assembly to its highest point. It is not without purpose that Providence has set Christians in companies for worship, instead of leaving them to render it privately or individually. Men like coals, kindle

best in the mass. Each serves as a radiator to throw heat upon his neighbor, and so the zeal of the whole is quickly raised. But let each worshipper be only a dull absorbent of the warmth that is thrown upon him from scripture, sermon, prayer, and hymn, and the preacher will find it a very onerous task to get the people into a devotional frame. Now, singing is a means of spiritual radiation; truth and love and fervor are easily contagious when it is the medium of intercourse. As the people speak to each other in psalms and hymns, there is a rapid circulation of the currents of devotion. The pulse of song beats quick, and the glow of worship is easily attained. One has little idea, who has not experienced it, of the help which it gives to a preacher to have a high average of fervor in the congregation. If only a few are kindled in the service of God's house, their warmth is absorbed and becomes latent in the inert mass about them. But if the majority is stirred so that the general level of feeling is high, a minister, with any sensibility, can feel the fact as soon as he comes into contact with them. We recognize the value of

communion or community of spiritual life in all worship. No man is to be an independent unit here: what he brings to church with him of interest, of desire, of earnestness, he brings to put into the common fund. And singing is the circulating medium of worship. It distributes the fervor of each Christian among his brethren, and equalizes the devotion of the whole body. Hence, I appeal to your sense of fairness. If you, the people, expect the preacher to stir you to duty by his sermons, ought you not to put yourselves in the best possible condition to be stirred? The preacher cannot furnish both incitement and susceptibility. Human affections and sympathies are the chords which he has to strike for God. These must be put into the best possible tune, and kept at the highest pitch of susceptiveness, if the strongest impression is to be produced. I am not theorizing. If any fact has been made clear to me in my pastoral experience, it is this: that the people that enter heartily and enthusiastically into the worship as earnest participants, can be inspired with interest and

moved to duty with half the labor which would otherwise be required. To throw a word into hearts that are all resonant with devotion, to touch chords that are all vibrant with sympathetic feeling, -- is a real delight in this. And what minister cannot feel the difference in the touch of a congregation, that has just risen before the sermon and poured itself out in an inspiring and hearty hymn of praise, from that of a religious audience, that has been quietly sitting and listening to a musical performance? There is a kind of spiritual elasticity in the former case which gives the preacher's words back to him in a responsive echo, which is so different from that dull thud which comes from dropping a sermon into a listless and silent company of hearers. Therefore, the worshippers owe it to themselves, to one another, to the preacher who is to address them, and to be blessed Trinity whom they adore, to sing with conscious spirit and articulate voice, joining with angels and arch-angels, and all the company of heaven, in praising and blessing God.

II. I wish to speak, secondly, of the duty of *singing with the heart*, as well as with the voice. “Singing and making melody in your heart unto the Lord.” It is the rhythm of the affections,” as one has beautifully said, answering to the rhythm of the words. It is the unspoken music of the heart verifying and according with the audible music of the lips.

The constant danger is, that, through habitual use, our worship may become mechanical and artificial. The ancient complaint of Jehovah, “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me,” is, alas too constantly applicable to us. It is so easy to let words ripple over the heart without ever stirring its depths. Sounds and sentences slip so lightly in the upward flight of worship, and yet often bear no burden of true penitence or thanksgiving. I am sure that we all must condemn ourselves of much insincerity in this matter and of too much emptiness and unrealness in our acts of worship. Constant use of sacred words and phrases wears away their sanctity; and the name of Jehovah.

the mere pronunciation of which, to the old Hebrew, was the most solemn act of his worship, is taken upon the lips with hardly a thought of its significance. And the peril is great enough from the carelessness and unspirituality of Christians, without insuring such a result by putting the service of song to be done by unconverted persons, or those of doubtful piety. What is melody without the spirit, and what is harmony without the heart? You have noticed the fountain on the Common, with the water running so noiselessly through iron lips, which can neither taste its sweetness, nor be refreshed by its coolness. And every Lord’s Day, in some of our churches, the most limpid strains of melody flow through lips that are just as oblivious to their import and just as unaffected by their sentiment as those lips of iron. How many times are those words, “Come, Holy Spirit,” sung and with no sense of longing for the blessed Comforter; with no apprehension of his holy mission; with no belief, indeed, in his divine personality. And what more direct and obvious method of violating the

commandment, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit," is possible than this? We have no doubt of the necessity of union with Christ, in order to pray acceptably and prevailingly. "No man cometh unto the Father but by me;" but the worship and praise and intercession of song must come to God through the same mediation, in order to be acceptable. "*By Him*, therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise." There are myriads of well-worded petitions, which, not being addressed through "Christ, have found no answer with God. And what if personifying song, as the poets have been wont to do, we say that it floats about the gates of glory in the form of myriads of soft-voiced, sweet-tongued angels of praise, which can find not entrance because bearing no seal of the Spirit and stamped with no mark of the atoning or interceding work of Christ.

It may have seemed a light thing to sing the most solemn words in a thoughtless and indifferent manner. But let us ask ourselves the question, If God can be pleased with a song that utters the true and love of our hearts as we sing it, can we sing that

same song without devotion and without love, and incur no displeasure from him? Singing in the house of God is a serious business. It is not a mere exercise of vocal gymnastics; it is not an entertainment for our pleasure or a means of ministering to our taste merely. It is worship, just as real as prayer is worship. And as such it demands the highest exercise of all our faculties, physical and spiritual. It needs to be under the most watchful vigilance, lest it be vitiated by the blasphemy of irreverence and worldly-mindedness. And so like one who has wrought so powerfully in the great revival in Scotland, by the power of his singing, let us make spiritual preparation for this service before we go to God's house; let us seek to get endued with power from on high, that our songs may have strength in them to rise on high; let us seek to be "filled with the Spirit," that we may "sing in the Spirit."

Indeed, when I think of the deep devotion which some of our favorite hymns breathe, the wonder is, that they do not always bring us into communion

with Christ while we are singing them. If we felt them, their utterance would be confessions of sin, acknowledgments of penitence, and acts of faith, such as belong to the very highest Christian experiences.. A Christian must be dead, indeed, who could sing Toplady's hymn, --

“Rock of ages, cleft for me,” –

which its author styled when he wrote it, “a living and dying prayer for the holiest believer in the world,” without being melted and subdued. I remember in my ministry, that a sorrowing penitent stepped instantly into the peace of reconciliation, as, in the midst of the congregation, his lips sung the words, --

“The Father hears him pray,
His dear anointed One.
He cannot turn away
The presence of his Son.”

And, instead of wondering at such experience, we may well ask why it is not a constant occurrence. Christians comforted, penitents healed, believers

assured and justified through the singing of a hymn.

Let me urge, in closing, two or three suggestions in regard to method in congregational singing.

1. In the first place, in order to reach its highest power and efficiency, the hymn should be sung, so far as possible, without break or interruption. Interludes between the stanzas, except occasionally for breathing, are a decided detraction from the general effect of the hymn. They check the rising tide of devotion, and divert the attention of the worshipper from his theme. No contrivance could be devised which is more thoroughly fitted to dilute devotion and keep back religious fervor from its highest exercise than this. The essentials to success in singing are very much the same as those which determine success in public speaking. And certainly nothing would so surely destroy the effect of an oration or a sermon as to interrupt it every moment or two by some irrelevant vocal or gymnastic exercise. Robert Hall held that one of the highest conditions to success in oratory is “momentum.” And it is pre-eminently

essential to power in Christian song. Motion generates heat; and if the heart would become powerfully kindled, there should be no resting for cooling off. Swiftly genders electricity; and, if we would have a strong and unbroken current of feeling, we should interpose no non-conductors between the stanzas of our song. The singing, on the contrary, should flow on in strong and unbroken current, kindling and intensifying as it rises till the end is reached. Neither listlessness on the part of the people, nor artificial interruptions on the part of the leader, should be allowed to retard its momentum.

And, again, the music employed should be so familiar as to be a help, and not a hindrance, to the expression of the hymn. It is not a question of singing from memory *versus* singing by note. It is rather that in either case, we should acquire such use of musical notes as to be unconscious of any effort in taking them up. As the most perfect bodily motion is that of which we are unaware, the limbs and organs obeying the volitions of the will, and

executing the mind's behests without any heaviness or weariness or halting to indicate the fact; so

singing is only perfect when the vocal expression is forgotten in attention to the sentiment and the feeling of the hymn. Therefore, by careful musical practice on the one hand, and by an avoidance of intricate melodies which perplex and embarrass the worshipper on the other, we should strive to make our singing the perfect and easy vehicle of our devotion.

With God Most High as the object of our praise, with Christ exalted as the Mediator of our praise, and with the Holy Ghost the Comforter as the Inspirer of our praise, how can we fail to sing with earnestness and power? God liveth forever. Therefore let us bless him at all times, and let his praise be continually in our mouth. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and forever. "By him, therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise continually, that is the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name." And the Spirit dwells in our bodies and enlightens our minds. Let us, therefore, "sing with the spirit and with the understanding also."

CHAPTER IV

THE WORSHIP OF GIVING.

“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye.

Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.” – 1 Cor. 16:1, 2

These words set before us another element of our Lord’s-day service; viz., the *worship of giving*. And let it be understood that I use this latter phrase in no accommodated or metaphorical sense, but as describing a literal and most vital element in a truly Christian form of Sabbath service.

I have before said that the true test of worship is in the fact of its looking Godward instead of manward. It is easy for us to think of praise and prayer, as ascending to God in worship; since these acts, by their very nature, tend upward as

Smoke and incense naturally rise to the sky. But money seems to have only a downward gravitation. It is of the earth. Earthy; and we can hardly conceive of it as taking any other direction, even when dropped into a contribution box. Yet there is a text in the Book of Acts that seems very strikingly to teach the contrary. “Cornelius, thy prayers *and thine alms* are come up for a memorial before God.” Alms cannot go alone to heaven. But they can come up on company with prayers. For prayer has a buoyancy that enables it not only to bear up our spiritual desires, but also to lift and carry heavenward our temporal gifts. Therefore the thoroughfares of worship are the surest avenues along which to transmit our alms and offerings. Prayer that is put in the name of Jesus must be the pilot and companion of our gifts, if they are to come before God with “the sweet-savor of Christ” upon them. Hence we believe, that in the purpose of God, almsgiving is an ordained element in our Lord’s-day service, -- an element as necessary to its complete idea as that of psalm-singing and intercessory prayer. And the text which we have

chosen, if we mistake not, contains a distinct and definite provision as to the manner in which this service is to be rendered.

I wish to show, then, in the following discourse, how almsgiving accords with those fundamental conditions of worship already mentioned.

I. *It is an expression of praise and thanksgiving.*

Worship, according to its strict meaning, is the acknowledgment of worthiness. We may make this acknowledgment in many ways, -- by the tribute of our faith, but the offering of our lips, or by the gift of our hands. The latter method, that of almsgiving, is not the least significant or emphatic expression of our homage to Christ. It is, on the contrary, a visible enunciation and rehearsal of that lofty strain of adoration, "Worthy the Lamb that was slain to receive *riches*." And when we take into consideration the requirement of the text, that Christians set apart of their offering "on the first day of the week," the idea of praise, in connection with their gifts, is made very distinct.

For the resurrection day was pre-eminently a day of thanksgiving to him "*who liveth and was dead*." All the worship of that day was modulated to this central idea. The breaking of bread rehearsed the solemn story of the sufferings of Christ, only that it might stir to higher exaltation, in view of the glory that followed. All the psalms and prayers and exhortations were keyed to this one uplifting thought, "The Lord is risen indeed." And almsgiving, whatever it may have signified before, was now pitched to the same loft theme. It was henceforth to be a resurrection hymn, set to the music of silver and gold, a joyful *Te Deum* of consecrated labor, counting up its gains and laying them at the feet of Christ. So we see, that the day on which this tribute was assessed, and the person to whom it was directed, both mark it beyond question as being an act of thanksgiving and worship.

Then notice how the subjective condition of true praise is also met by the text, "*as God hath prospered him*." We are required not only to sing with the spirit in the worship of God's house, but with the understanding also." There must be an

intelligence in our praise. Our thanksgivings must rest upon a true and sensible appreciation of our mercies and blessings; and so spring from a solid ground of sincerity in us, as well as be directed to a lofty view of worthiness and grace in God. Hence, in this requirement of praise, by almsgiving” *as God hath prospered him,*” the Scripture turns back the thoughts of the Lord’s-day worshipper upon the week that has preceded him. It sets him to reviewing his mercies, and taking the measure of his prosperity. It makes hi his own assessor, that his inventory may be honest, and his offering true. And what provision for sincerity is contained in the clause! The law of tithes, as enforced under the old dispensation, must have tended to formalism; since to do a thing by rule and by rote is almost certain to get one out of the way of doing with the heart. But the gospel, because it lays such a strenuous demand on heartiness in Christian service, has a different method. It requires each believer to tax himself: it says to him not “Look to my law, and pay me what thou owest,” but “Look upon my mercies, and to

your own redeemed heart make answer ‘How much owest thou thy Lord?’”

When we consider, therefore, how vitally pre-requisite to true thanksgiving reflection is, we shall be struck at once with the divine wisdom of the requirement which throws the mind back upon the blessings of the week. As penitence must precede faith, that so the heart, re-acting from its own unworthiness, may move strongly towards Christ in believing trust, so reflection upon past blessings must be had to give an impact and rebound of the heart towards God In grateful thanksgiving. If this exercise be wanting, formality and heartlessness in our charity become inevitable. For, if we give from custom or habit, when there is no inward impulse of thankfulness behind our act; or if we give simply at the beck and dun of the contribution box, when there has been no mature and grateful intention to make an offering to the Lord, --our sacrifice has lost its sweetest charm, its only consecrating oil, the grace of voluntariness. A gift that has been coerced, however mildly, has thereby been robbed of half its moral value to the receiver, and at the

same time has robbed the giver of his truest reward, the sense of freeness of will in his bestowing.

“Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily as to the Lord and not unto men,” is the command of Scripture. We deprecate formalism in our lip-service, the worshipping of God with the tongue while the heart is far from him; but I wonder that it has not more frequently occurred to us to be on our guard against formalism in our benevolence, against the barren ceremonialism of honoring God with the stamp on the bank bill, while the dear charity of grateful love and self-surrendering devotion is want in the act.

Words in our worship must carry double to be of real value. They must be laden with thought, and they must be burdened with love. Empty them of the first, and they are unintelligible to man; empty them of the last, and they are unacceptable to God. Charity also must have the double burden of value in dollars and cents, and value in sincere devotion, if it is to be at once a blessing to man and an honor to God. As it is merely the vocal quality of song

that constitutes its acceptableness, but its soul and spirituality, so it is not the ring of the coin, or the flutter of the scrip in the contribution-box, that constitutes the worship of benevolence. Unless there be a sincere purpose of giving all for the Lord, it is sounding brass, but not divine charity,

I would, therefore, that we could bring ourselves to a literal and whole-hearted conformity to this apostolic rule, “Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by at home (the words mean literally) as God hath prospered him.” It is a kind of family devotion, an act of private and household worship, in preparation for the service of God’s house. If it were habitual with us, it would, I am sure, settle all our difficulties I regard to this department of our Christian service. The calm hour of retrospection on the Lord’s-day morning, wherein all the mercies of the week should be made to pass before the memory; the mind that has been busy for itself now sitting for God, at the receipt of custom, and taking tribute from all the week-day blessings; gratitude summing up the account, and

directing the obedient worshipper how much to carry with him to the sanctuary,-- if this were our method, there would be great inequality in our contributions indeed, since the degrees of human prosperity are infinitely various: but there would be a perfect adjustment of charity to necessity, of supply to need, since the returns would be according to God's providence, and not according to man's caprice; and in that providence, summing up all its variations, there is a perfect equilibrium between man's ability to give and man's necessity of receiving.

If this rule were carried out, the worship of beneficence would be what it is not, what it cannot be, now, a perfect measure and expression of our feelings. God want us, above all things, to be honest in our approaches to him. The overdoing and the underdoing are alike to be deprecated. If giving is a confession of gratitude, let no persuasions of collectors commit us to what we do not feel, and make us hypocrites in our almsgiving; and let no reluctance of our avarice bind us to a feeble expression, when in our heart of hearts the acknowledgment is "The Lord hath done great

things for us whereof we are glad," and so make us shortcomers in our charity. This last we know too well is the greatest danger of man, and one which most demands our commiseration. If the dumb child, spelling out his prayers with his fingers in the house of God, move our pity; if the def mute, overflowing with a sense of the Saviour's love, but able to tell it only by touching gestures, excites our sympathy, how much more the prosperous Christian, who is so constrained and finger-bound in his utterances that he can only talk of the infinite grace and goodness of God in the vocabulary of fraction currency.

Giving is praise. Let it, therefore, be large and royal, according to the measure of God's mercy to us. Giving is an element of our Lord's-day worship; let it, therefore, have a resurrection uplook, and tell to God more eloquently and powerfully than nay words can do, that being "risen with Christ," we "seek those thing which are above," that we are laboring more intently to lay up treasures in heaven than to heap together earthly goods. Giving is a weekly requirement; therefore

every Sabbath let us count up our mercies, and wait not for the grand sum-total at the end of life. "We must not make God stay for our praises till he hath finished his mercies," says an old divine; "but praise him in the beginning, and in the midst of his mercies. The Lord is at hand; and if you do but believe that the King is on the road towards your town, then raise your bells and right him in, and stay not till he be entered within the gates."

II. Consider, secondly, that almsgiving is an *expression of sacrifice*, and so again conforms to a fundamental principle of worship. "But to do good and communicate forget not," says the apostle. "*for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.*"

Now, we must remember that the one sacrifice of Christ, which we celebrate each Lord's Day, does not supersede our personal sacrifice, but rather implies and recognizes it. "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, *arm yourselves likewise with the same mind,*" are the words of Scripture. True, sacrifice now is a very different thing from what it was under the old

economy. It is self-sacrifice, not the sacrifice of victims. It is a living sacrifice, not a deed one. It is rendered to God as a token of gratitude for our acceptance through the Lamb of God, and not in order that we may thereby obtain acceptance. Nevertheless, it must be a sacrifice in the truest and deepest sense of the word. Every element in the sacrifice of Christ must have its counterpart in us. He "endured the cross:" we must take up the cross daily and follow him. He "bare our sins in his own body on the tree:" we must present our bodies a living sacrifice to God. He, though rich, "for our sakes became poor:" we must see to it, therefore, both the abundance of our joy and our deep poverty abound unto the riches of our liberality. Not as though by any of thee things we could hope to add to that "One offering by which he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified," but that the spirit which was in Christ's great self-denial may prolong and perpetuate itself in us, the members of his body, that so we may "fill up that which is behind in the sufferings of Christ for his body's sake, which is

is the Church.”

We gather, then, the lesson, that our offering must be the expression of our own personal consecration in order to be acceptable to God. We do not give to make ourselves accepted with God, but as a holy token of our gratitude that we have been already “accepted in the Beloved.” What a beautiful thing that is which the apostle says concerning the Macedonian Christians and the way in which they contributed to his necessity: “*They first gave their own selves to the Lord*, and unto us by the will of God.” Here is the true pattern of Christian beneficence. Self-consecration first, and the consecration of that which belongs to self afterwards. And here is the true ground of our duty in almsgiving, that we have been washed, that we have been sanctified. Since our persons, then, have been presented to him also; and, since our bodies have been made “temples of the Holy Ghost,” let us give to God the gold that belongs to those bodies, since it “is the temple that sanctifies the gold.” Now, if we will think of it, our money is the most genuine and comprehensive material sacrifice that

we can possibly bring to God, since it is the truest representative of ourselves. I ask you, business man, what you have to show for the labor and thought and anxiety and calculation of the past twenty years. And you point to the funds that lie accumulated in the bank. That money is simply the coinage of yourself, your time, your energy, and your very life. We have a gold basis for our currency; but we have another basis on which both our gold and our currency rest; viz., a brain and muscle basis. Every dollar we possess, if honestly acquired, has been coined in the mint of our mental and physical toil, and is stamped with the image and superscription of our truest self. And hence a most obvious and direct method of self-sacrifice is this of the worship of giving. And the excellency of it is that it brings secular service to divine, and makes it tributary to it. You can, by bringing a gift of money to the lord, give a concrete expression of your whole week’s labor; you can make every day of the week bring contribution to the Lord’s Day. Complaining that your time has been so much absorbed by your business that you have found little

opportunity for thought during the six days, you can now take just as large a revenge as you please by making every one of those six days bring a revenue of worship to the Lord when his tithing day come round.

We forget, I thin, how thoroughly in our own hands the remedy for business diversions lies. Let the rule of the test be enforced, and let a decree go out from the Lord's Day that every week day shall be taxed, and you will soon find that your business hours have received a wonderful consecration. Instead of looking back upon your six working days as a band of marauders, each making way with its plunder of time and energy and devotion into the irrevocable past, you will see each one of them marching up to pay its tribute to him who is Lord of the Sabbath, and to whom all the other days should bow down in worship.

Thus the Lord's Day, to the Christian, ought to be a kind of summary and epitome of his week days. Instead of being a periodic exception, a fragment of holy time, interjected between certain portions of

secular time, it ought to be the culmination of all his week-day time; the flower of his days, that has compressed all their finest juices into itself. Business robbing God; a ledger purloining the attention that belongs of right to the Bible; work trenching on the rights of worship, family or private,-- all this is to be mourned over and regretted. But if, when Sunday come round, it puts the climax on this fraud of holy things, compelling God to say "Ye have robbed me in tithes and offerings," our case is truly pitiable; for it is to indorse, and, as it were, reiterate our six days' remissness by a seventh day's defalcation in our account with God.

But we may not only, in a certain sense, retrieve the religious shortcomings of the week by a Sunday sacrifice, but utilize them by turning over to God the price of our infidelity. You are sorry that you have been so little spiritual and heavenly minded in the midst of your business employments. Well in the worship of the Lord's Day, express that sorrow. Let God read the measure of your penitence, not in the terms of self-accusation and tears merely, but in

that which he can understand as well as we, -- the figures on a bank-bill. Epitomize your little daily regrets over your worldliness in on great regret on Sunday, told to the Lord in the freewill offering laid by in store. This was the way of penitence of Zaccheus expressed itself. He was a chief among the publicans, having enriched himself, so far as we can judge, by grinding extortions. But when he had seen Jesus, and been subdued by his love, we hear him saying, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold." I call that the most genuine style of repentance on record. Oh! for more of that kind of penitential worship, -- the rich man saying, " Lord, I have been worldly-mindful and forgetful of thee during the week; the cares of the world have choked the word in my heart and rendered it unfruitful, but I have gained a thousand dollars. Here, Lord, I give five hundred of it to thee." That were a penitent lament to move the heart of Christ, a litany of sorrow that would brig gladness unspeakable to the poor and needy.

We do not begin to comprehend the moral leverage, the spiritual purchase, we have on our Christian life in the worship of giving. Some of you complain that the world obtrudes itself upon your Sabbaths. Your heart has been so engrossed in business, that you cannot extricate it on the Lord's Day. You enter the house of God, and, instead of your heart going up to God in praise, it is stuck fast in the entanglements of some business speculation, or some financial responsibility, and you are tugging all the while to bring it back, and so have it with you in the church and in the service of the Sabbath.

Bur there is a certain remedy for all this, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Put ten thousand dollars in a bank, and see if thenceforth you have nay difficulty in fixing your thoughts on that bank, in remembering that street on which it stands, and the name of the cashier, and the amount of interest that is coming due.

Lay by in store each Lord's Day a deposit for him. See if you do not get your heart in to your Sundays' see if you do not get dividends of grace that you

never knew of as falling due on that day; see if your whole worship is not pervaded with a new spirit and power henceforth.

And so, I repeat it, I would that in all our churches there might be a return to the spirit and the letter alike of this apostolic rule. How thoroughly it would fix in us the habit of a thoughtful consideration of God's mercies! How profoundly would it discipline our inward spirit to the truth that we are only pensioners of our Father, and the almoners of his bounty! The Lord's-day worship would be more sincere, more hearty, and more chastened if we came to it always from a little Sanctuary at home, where we had settled, in quiet meditation, the claims of God upon us, and apportioned out our sacrifice for him. It would turn our charity into orderly and systematic service for the Lord who bought us, instead of leaving it to be, what is so often is, the outcome of sudden impulse, the unripe fruit of emotion, or the heartless price which we render to the demands of custom or respectability. In the public service of the sanctuary, there would be that holy spontaneity and sincerity which constitutes the very genius of that

worship which "is in sincerity and in truth." The Lord's poor would suffer no lack, and be compelled to no humiliating beggary. Every prayer of supplication to God for aid by the poor, would be found to have been answered in the prayer of thanksgiving by the rich, with its accompanying offering. And so, in the worship of the Lord's Day, not only would the rich and poor meet together, but the hard inequalities between them would be leveled, and each man's want be matched by another man's bounty.

This, brethren, is the day which the Lord has hallowed by his resurrection from the dead. On it let prayer be made for him continually; on it let there be given unto him the gold of Sheba and the riches of the earth, for he is worthy. Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice! "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name." "*Bring an offering and come before him. Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.*"

CHAPTER V

THE CONGREGATIONAL AMEN.

“And all the people said Amen.” – 1 Chron. 16:36.

We have in thee words a delightful glimpse of a worshipping congregation. Our modern religious assemblies have acquired the most fitting name of, “audiences,” since it has become their sole employment to hear. But whatever title may have been given to the early Jewish and Christian congregations, their character is clearly seen. They were not dumb-waiters, tarrying in silence to be filled with the provisions of God’s house. They were worshippers, who spake as well as heard; who answered the Lord when he addressed them by the mouth of his servants as well as listened reverently to his message. And though the Jewish service was far more exclusive and ministerial than ours in theory profess to be, being priestly and not popular,

yet we find all through it traces of congregational responses and participations.

In the instance which is brought before us in the text, we have a striking illustration of this. A psalm of David had just been recited. It was a prayer of thanksgiving, set to music. It was a joyful, fervid rehearsal of the Lord’s merciful dealings with his people. It began with a thanksgiving and ended with a doxology. And when the closing strains fell upon the ear,--“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel for ever and ever.” – the words dropped not into a stagnant silence, which gave back no ripple of response, no answering echo of accord, but into a spirit of worship which was as resonant as a mountain atmosphere, and out of which “all the people said Amen, and praised the Lord.”

It is my purpose, in this discourse, to consider Jewish and Christian uses of the Amen.

I. The meaning and uses of the word Amen, as employed in the Jewish service.

It is a Hebrew term, consisting of three letters, which the Jews read acrostically, thus, “Al, Melek, Neman.” – God is a trustworthy King.”

Used in response to some word or promise of God, it was, therefore, in the first place, a confession of faith. As uttered by the worshipper, it simply avowed confidence in the word and promise and covenant of the Lord. I may say it was a symbol or monogram of faith, -- a confession of trust put into the most brief and concrete form.

All ordinance of worship, if you will think of it, are condensed and abbreviated expressions of assent to Christian truth. Baptism gathers up the doctrine of the cross and resurrection into a compact symbol for sealing our consent to the declaration of God, that Jesus Christ was "crucified for our offences and raised again for our justification." The Lord's Supper is an enacted consent to the doctrine of the sufferings of Christ, and the glory which is to follow, -- a sacramental amen by the elements of bread and wine. And so of all true acts of worship: they are not overtures of ours to God but "the answer of a good conscience," on our part, to what God has said. They are declarations of faith; and faith is not the believer's covenant with Christ, but

but his ratification of Christ's covenant with him, which has been written in the blood of the cross. And so a Christian "Amen" if faith's indorsement of the truth of God. "He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true."

Go back to the Jewish service, and see how significant this term was to the true Israelite. Accompany him to the holy place. There he is, kneeling reverently before the altar, confessing his sins, and owning his powerlessness to atone for a single one of his offences. Then the priest point him to the mercy-seat, sprinkled with blood, telling by that crimson signature that the offering for his guilt has been made, and that therefore God pronounces his sins remitted, and his iniquities forgiven. Beholding this, he falls prostrate on his face before the mercy-seat, and worships God; and then, as the strains of praise break forth from the lips of the mediator between Jehovah and himself, he replies, with a word into which all the trust and assurance and adoration of his soul compressed, "Amen." "God is faithful, and he will perform it."

Would his worship have been complete without that “Amen”? Nay; no more than your business-contract would be complete without your signature. It was faith’s seal, set to the covenant of God, without which Jehovah would have been robbed of his honor, and the worshipper defrauded of his peace of conscience.

Again, the amen was an expression of prayer. When the words of petition were uttered, if the people could not repeat them *verbatim*, they could epitomize them in one brief expression, that took into itself the spirit and meaning of the whole petition. It was like the offerings of the husbandman. The whole golden harvest could not be taken into the temple and presented before the Lord; but a sheaf, which stood for the whole, could be taken. And so the amen was the wave-sheaf of the whole prayer, offered up by each worshipper before Jehovah. It does not follow, therefore, that in order for one to unite in the public supplications of God’s house, he must say all the words with the minister, though this might be a help to devotion,

if it were possible. A single expression of indorsement is enough. Another can write your check for you, but your signature must be put to it before it is valid.. And the pious Jew seems to have thought it absolutely necessary to set his audible amen to the prayer of the minister, in order to make it his own.

Now, if you will think of it, all the offices of the Christian ministry are merely representative. The pastor is simply one of the members of the church whose duty it is to lead the devotions of the flock. In preaching, he ministers *to* the people indeed; but in praying the ministers *among* the people and *with* the people; voicing their desires, and gathering up their needs and their confessions, and presenting them before the Lord. As preacher, it is not a commendation of his words that he needs to hear, but the strong and confident “Amen,” “That is true,” “The testimony of the Lord is sure” and “All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him amen, to the glory of God.” But when he prays, he wants to hear the people owning and honoring their own prayers, and indorsing them with their personal and

hearty “Amen!” “Be it so!” How it seems to strengthen and fortify the prayer when all the people say Amen! It is like the *viva voce* vote in the assembly, where unanimous assent is given to your motion. It is not simply a multiplication of voices, but an aggregation of minds upon a single point. The intercessor with God seems to hear in it the rush of a multitude of hearts, massing their desires, and sweeping up at the end of the petition to re-enforce his solitary prayer, and help it storm the gates of grace.

The minister, who is truly devout and sensitive to the spiritual temper of his people, will be able indeed to feel their silent unison of heart with him, and to be strengthened by the companionship of their unspoken desires. But words intensify feelings, and speech gives power of touch and contact to sympathy. To know, by subtle intuition, when you pray, that faithful souls are pressing round you to second your desired and swell the volume of your intercession, is a blessed thing. But to be assured of this by the audible response of a

multitude of voices is wonderfully strengthening. Yet, from the unhappy custom into which worshippers have so largely fallen of listening to the public supplications, instead of joining in them, how often is the minister compelled to say to himself, after struggling in the pangs of unattended prayer, “I have trodden the wine-press alone; and of the people there was none with me.”

Now, the habit of uniting mentally in the public prayer tends instinctively to the audible utterance which I have mentioned. When desire is active, and feeling rises to its highest pitch, there is an irresistible pressure on the flood-gates of speech, and the final response becomes a necessity for relieving the pent-up burden of devout emotion. And then what power is there in the Amen! Compress the fervor and feeling of a half-hour’s prayer in to a single word, and it is like the charged projectile, swift and powerful, and instant in execution. Have you not heard an amen that has gone far deeper into your soul than the prolonged petition that preceded it: it was so surcharged with condensed and burning emotion? Brevity is often the soul of eloquence.

And the powder that flashes harmlessly into the air, when unconfined, has resistless energy when all its force is pent up and put behind a minie ball, so the amen that packs the prayer of myriad words into a single vocable may strike quicker and go deeper than the prayer itself could do.

And there was still another use of the amen in the Hebrew worship. It was employed for self-conviction under the rebukes of God's law.

In our silent service, it is very easy to evade reproof, and give the go-by to the searching accusations of the truth. In the worship which God instituted, men were made to face correction, and give audible assent to the detailed and specific charges of the law. Let me give you a specimen of the directions which Moses laid upon the people.

“And the Levites shall speak, and say unto the men of Israel with a loud voice,

“Cursed be the man that maketh any graven or molten image, and abomination unto the Lord, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and putteth it in a secret place. *And all the people shall answer and say, Amen.*

“Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother. *All the people shall say, Amen.*

“Cursed be he that removeth his neighbor's landmark. *And all the people shall say, Amen.*

“Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wand out of the way. *And all the people shall say, Amen.*”

How this kind of worship drove transgressors to the wall! It compelled them to convict themselves, and ratify their own condemnation. The wayward and unfilial son could not hide behind a non-committal silence as the minister said, “Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother.” He must say amen, and thus vote for his own conviction, and sign his own anathema.

Now, I think there would be no quicker way to poll the house of a modern congregation, than to require all the people to say amen to what they heard. You would find some who would beg to be excused when the words, “He that believeth not is condemned already” were pronounced. And you would find that some would confess to a silent,

stubborn nay! Rising up within them when the minister said, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema, Maranatha."

Well, it is not the method of Christian worship to exact such confession from unwilling hearts. Its service is voluntary, not enjoined; spontaneous, not compulsory. But how good were it to hear Christians say amen under the righteous accusations of truth. "Confess your faults to one another," is the commandment of the gospel. We may put our confession in our own words, or we may give public consent to the words of God. And when he says, "Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation, how well were it for us if we would stand up and take upon our lips the self-condemning amen, because we are guilty in respect to our "tithes and offerings," and ought humbly and openly to own it. And then might we with double joy give the amen of faith, as we heard the blessed words of atoning grace, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us."

O brethren! We are not responsive enough under the threatenings and the promises, the benedictions and anathemas, of the gospel! If our hearts were filled with the Spirit, they would be as vibrant to the touch of truth as the musician's harp to his fingers. And the, under God's accusations, their amen would be a note of contrition that would wake all about us to the dreadful reality of sin' and, under his promises, a strain of gladness that would thrill the whole body of believers with thanksgiving to God for his unspeakable gift.

II. I have spoken of the meaning and uses of the amen in the Jewish worship; and it now remains for us to consider whether it has any use and obligation in the Christian service.

Of course, as I have said, Christian worship is not enjoined according to rigid and undeviating rules. The law which fixes it is the law of liberty on the one hand, and the law of fitness and highest usefulness on the other. But, as we have already seen, the principles which underlie the Jewish amen are equally vital and fundamental to the Christian worship, --the principles of faith and prayer and self-reproof.

Why, then, should they not find expression in the same way! I sincerely believe they ought. It would put new power and unction and heartiness into our services if it could be so, -- aye, more, I am persuaded that the congregational amen is just as greatly needed for lifting our Lord's-day worship from that dead level of silence into which it has so largely sunken, as the congregational singing is. "Silence is god, speech is silver," says the proverb. True. And "*thy silver and thy gold are mine, saith the Lord.*" No matter which is best, God made both, and has use for both in his house. The sacraments are silent acts of worship. When they rehearse their sacred mysteries, there is no speech nor language, -- their voice is not heard. They speak to the eye and to the touch and to the taste, but not to the ear. After the simple introductory formula has been repeated, they tell their story in silence. They need not to be prompted by the administrator, or to have their utterance garnished with any poor human speech. In holy stillness they carry on their blessed ministry. And there is rest and refreshment

in that quiet, sequestered sanctuary of meditation into which they bring us. Speech is intrusive here; talk is irreverent and distracting. They seem to say, by their mute symbology, "Be still, and hear what God will say to you."

But song and prayer are vocal exercises. And total silence here is as unseemly and misplaced as speech was before. It gives the worshippers the semblance of being spectators instead of participants, -- Gentiles without the court, instead of members in Christ of the "royal priesthood," whose privilege it is to enter together into the holiest, to make intercession before God. With the immense advantage of unwritten, spontaneous prayer which we enjoy, there need be no corresponding disadvantage of non-participation, if devoutly following the leader of worship with our minds and hearts, we will at the end repeat the *one word* that summarizes, and seals and delivers up, the whole prayer to God. The summary is not less than the particulars, because so brief. In one sense it is superior, since it is all in little. Therefore, the Rabbis were wont to say concerning their worship,

“Greater is he who saith Amen than he who prays.”

And the amen is yours, Christian worshippers, believers in Jesus Christ: it is not the minister’s. And the usage that has purloined it from you, and quietly put it to his exclusive us, is akin to that which in the Romish Church has deprived the laity of the cup. I repeat it, it is your property in the service of the Lord’s house. You cannot find a single instance in the ancient worship were it was a private and priestly prerogative. It was always a second party of class of persons, and not the principal speaker, who used it. “And David said, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel for ever and ever. And *all the people answered, Amen, Amen.*’ And *all the people said, Amen.*” – “And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And *all the people answered, Amen, Amen.*” Therefore, Christian brethren, worshippers of God and Jesus Christ, unless you are willing to be defrauded, and perhaps, at the same time, also to defraud Jehovah, take what is yours, and use it henceforth for the glory of God.

But we wish to be scriptural in our conduct,

as well as conformable to reason and propriety, -- to follow the gospel as well as the law. And what proof is there, it will be asked, that the apostolic church so used this article of worship?

Well, we have at most, only the most casual and fragmentary hints regarding the mode of worship in the early Christian Church. But the use of the responsive “Amen” seems to be one of the points about which there can be no question.

Paul writing to the Corinthians, in regard to their prayers in the public assembly, enjoins that they speak in intelligent language, and not in an unknown tongue. “Else,” says he, “when thou bless with the Spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest?” He that occupieth the room of the unlearned” is, clearly, the private hearer, in distinction from the one who is addressing the assembly under the direction of the Spirit. It might seem sufficient to have urged that the speaker uses an intelligible language, in or that the hearers might understand

and be edified. But the apostle carries the obligation still farther, and urges it on the ground that the listener must not be defrauded of his amen, as though that were an essential element of public worship, and a sacred prerogative of the worshipper. The Romish Church, as we know, worships in an unknown tongue. But she has sought to assuage the cruelty of depriving the people of hearing and understanding, by calling them, at the proper moment, by tinkling of a bell, to respond with the voice to what has been said. But custom, often less kind than superstition, has, in many of our Protestant congregations, practically forbidden the joyful uprising response, after, in our own mother tongue, we have been permitted to hear our sins confessed, and our pardon besought and found. In the light of this text of the apostle, who can doubt that the custom ought to be broker? It is evidently a habit which has been foisted upon us by irreverence and neglect, and not ordained for us by reason and Scripture. It bears the stamp of an easy undevoutness, rather than of a hearty and strenuous

religious earnestness. If Paul has not in this scripture distinctly commanded the congregational amen after the prayer, he has, as one of our wisest commentators declares, given us “a precedent so clear as to amount almost to an authoritative precept; and one which must raise the question, whether so large a portion of the Christian church has not done wrong in entirely omitting so important a part of public service.”

And this reference which we have drawn from Paul, concerning the scripturalness of this custom, is emphasized in the strongest possible way, by the fact that we find the usage prevailing in the age directly following the apostolic. Justin Martyr, who could almost touch hands with the immediate disciples of Jesus, declare, that, in his day, the Amen of the congregation, at the end of the chief prayer of the worship, was so universal and hearty that it sounded like a peal of thunder. How impressive it must have been! Ho impressive it would be now, if we could hear it! It would be more than the emphasis of voluminous sound. It would, if sincerely uttered, be a declaration of unity

of heart, touching the things desired and the praises offered.

Have you ever been in the Legislature, and heard a petition read from the people, and the signatures thus announced, --“A. B., and one thousand others”? And what weight and impressiveness there has been in that sentence, “*and one thousand others*”? The silent, invisible host pressing behind the chief petitioner, and seeming to say, “*We* must be heard if he is not. If you refuse him and set him aside, each one of us in turn will step into his vacant place to reiterate and prolong the request, till, our very importunity, you shall be compelled to grant us our desire.” And so I would, that when your minister prays, there might follow his supplication such a peal of accordant amens, that the listeners among the people, as they heard the sound of the angels in heaven, as they were saluted by the uprising acclamation, might be compelled to exclaim, in very truth, “The minister and one thousand others.”

My friends, habit is the worst of tyrants, and tradition the most inexorable of masters. But I

am sure we are strong enough to resist them, when they would bind us to what is clearly undesirable. I believe I have shown from Scripture that the amen of the whole congregation, at the close of the minister’s prayer, is not only proper, but necessary to the true idea of co-operative and congregational worship; and not only necessary, but enjoined by apostolic example just as distinctly as the keeping of the Lord’s Day is. I do not by any means say that it is equally important. There are major requirements; and there are minor requirements; but, if they are requirements, their authority is the same. A blade of grass depends for its existence upon the same laws of growth and nutrition as the oak and the cedar. And the least commandment of Scripture has the same will of God as its basis as the greatest. Shall we not attend to that which is least, then, as well as to that which is greatest?

I know all that can be said of the danger of formality in our Lord’s-day worship. But formality belongs no more to thoughtless utterance than to thoughtless repression; to vain repetitions than to

vain silence. Indeed, the constant peril of non-participation in religious worship is that decorous inattention – that worst kind of formalism—may become habitual. By all means let what we do be done with all the heart; and since utterance is confessedly a spur and stimulus to feeling, as well as its vehicle, let us speak more, that we may attend more to what we speak. We shall be on the alert to listen, if we indorse by our amen. We shall try to believe more intensely with the heart, if we must make confession with the mouth. Oh, that all the people would not only say amen, but say it with such depth of sincerity and earnestness that it should be the expression of their united faith,—the importunate knocking of scores of souls at the doors of mercy, before which the Lord should answer, “Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation that keepeth the amen may enter in”! How *can* we be silent before truths that might make the very stones cry out? Nay, let us use our privilege for the glory of God; and when the minister praises God for the blessings which have been purchased for us by the

sufferings of Christ, saying, “Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift,” let us who have been redeemed, say “Amen at his giving of thanks.” And when he repeats to us, that brightest promise of the coming glory, “Surely, I come quickly,” let us joyfully, and with one voice, respond, *Amen!*
Even so, come Lord Jesus.”

NOTES

NOTE 1.—P. III. (Pg. 47)

The Psalms printed according to the original parallelisms form, beyond all comparison, the best arrangement for responsive reading. In the first place, as so arranged, they are divided into much briefer verses than in the common edition, so that there is little danger of that jumbling and confusion which are so likely to occur in reading long paragraphs.

And, in the second place, we believe it will be admitted, after a little trial, that neither by the ordinary prose version, nor by any of the metrical translations, is the force of the Psalm brought out with such power and emphasis as when rendered in this way. Since this method of using the Psalter has been introduced into the author's congregation, the expression has been frequent and strong, "We have never realized the beauty and significance of the Psalms still we have read them in this manner." Editions have been published in this form, and are now used in several Congregational and Baptist churches within the author's acquaintance [*vide* "Responsive Worship," by Rev. W. I. Budington, D.D.]. Those desiring them can procure them from the publishers of this volume.

In order that any so desiring may get a suggestion as to the place which the responsive Psalm may occupy in the worship, we append the following order of services recently adopted by the Clarendon-street Baptist Church, Boston: --

A. M.

- I. ANTHEM. [By the Choir.]
- II. DOXOLOGY. [Without announcement, Congregation rising, and singing "Praise God, from whom all blessings flow, &c.]
- III. INVOCATION. (Congregation standing.)
- IV. HYMN. [By the Choir, Congregation sitting.]
- V. .PSALM. [Read responsively, Cong. standing.]
- VI. SCRIPTURE. [Congregation sitting.]
- VII. PRAYER. [Congregation bowing down,]
- VIII. HYMN. [Congregation standing and singing.]
- IX. SERMON.
- X. PRAYER AND BENEDICTION. [Cong. stand.]

P.M.

- I. ANTHEM. By the Choir.]
- II. COMMANDMENTS, LORD'S PRAYER, OR BEATITUDES. [Congregation sitting.]
- III. PSALM. [Read responsively, Cong. standing.]
- IV. HYMN, [By the Choir, Congregation sitting.]
- V. SCRIPTURE. [Congregation sitting.]
- VI. SCRIPTURE. [Congregation sitting.]
- VII. HYMN. [Congregation standing and singing.]
- VIII. SERMON.
- IX. HYMN. [Congregation standing and singing.]
- X. PRAYER AND BENEDICTION, [Cong stand.]

NOTE B. – P. III. (pg. 60)

This subject of the relation of congregational singing to revivals is a very interesting one, and one which it would be extremely useful to follow out had we time and space. We give one or two suggestive quotations on the subject: -- “By an instinct as strong as it is infallible, the Church has always indicated a quickened life by a larger use of psalms and hymns- *Rev. Henry Allon.*

“It is remarkable, that, when the kingdom of God has been making any new appearance, a mighty zeal for the singing of psalms has attended it and assisted it.” *Cotton Mather*

The devoted McCheyne said, “My dear flock, I am deeply persuaded that there will be no full, soul-filling heart-ravishing, heart-satisfying outpouring of the Spirit of God till there be more praise and thanksgiving to the Lord. Learn dearly-beloved, to praise God heartily; to sing with all your heart and soul in the family and in the congregation; then I am persuaded that God will give his Holy Spirit to fill the house, - - to fill every heart in the spiritual temple.

Whitefield describes very vividly one of his great revival meetings, and uses these words in regard to the singing which attended it: --

“To behold such crowds standing together, and to *hear the echo of their singing resounding over the mighty mass,* suggested to me the scene of the general assembly of the spirits of just men made perfect, when they shall join in singing the song of Moses and the Lamb in heaven.”

NOTES.

NOTE C. – P.III. [pg. 60]

“Choir-music was introduced into the church in the fourth century. At this time a distinct class of persons was appointed to take charge of this part of religious worship. But the people continued for a century or more to enjoy, in some measure, their ancient privilege of singing together,--joining occasionally in the chorus, and singing the responses....The clergy eventually claimed the right of performing sacred music as a privilege exclusively their own. Thus from the people, it would seem, church-music passed first to certain appointed officers of the Church, and from them to the clergy; and, the more effectually to exclude the people from any participation in this exercise, the singing was now in Latin.

“This entire monopoly of the music by the clergy continued until the era of the Reformation, when Luther restored, as the sacramental cup to the mouth, so music to the lips of the people.”

See excellent work, “Service of Song,” by A. T. Stacy, A.M., to whom I am indebted for this quotation and several others on the subject of congregational singing.

