

The Scottish Tradition in Worship.

THE Scottish people have always been conservative in matters of worship, and two tendencies of the present time increase the suspicion with which so-called innovations are regarded. One is the increasing drift towards England of various national institutions, and the other the steady increase of the Irish population of the country. One sympathises with dislike of the notion that the Church of Scotland might ever become, like so many of our banks, railways and business companies, a mere provincial branch with its headquarters in London. Also, while condemning their methods, one understands those who nourish sectarian bitterness because of the economic and cultural effects of so large an alien immigration. It is difficult to persuade many that Romanism grows not by conversion but by importation, and that Protestant strength is to be shown not by terrified starting at shadows but by fearless continuance on the path of Reformed tradition and by such improvements of it, even though they may have the appearance of concessions, as shall conserve and consolidate its principles.

Necessity, however, is laid upon all who would be leaders in this respect to be tireless in teaching and explaining the essential conceptions of Reformed Worship and in making clear what are our Scottish traditions in that respect. For this purpose ministers of the Church have ample resources in the publications—to name but a few—of Dr Sprott and Dr Thomas Leishman of a past generation and of Dr W. D. Maxwell and Dr Wm. McMillan of to-day. The present writer has no idea of covering the ground of these patient and scholarly researches beyond pointing out how fully confirmed the position is that the Scottish movement for reform of worship is not Anglicising or a recrudescence of Popery but the conservation and restoration of the true heritage of that Church. Its leaders are not, as is often said, attempting to “make the Church Catholic”, but to prove that it is both Catholic and Reformed, more Catholic because reformed than those denominations to which others are so ready to concede the sole use of that honourable title. They rightly claim to be nearer to Knox and the Reformers and to

Gillespie, Rutherford and the Covenanters than the loudest supporters of so-called Protestant forms, and justly profess to be truer to the memory of the past than the upholders of customs which are recent and unworthy and which owe their presence in our country more to Cromwell than to any native source.

The Scottish tradition in worship began, in any case, not with the sixteenth century, but was a living reality in the fourth. The conjecture that the Celtic liturgy was purer and more Apostolic than any surviving ancient form lacks historical evidence. It may be true, however, as the impartial German historian, Heinrich Zimmer, concludes, that the Scottish Church had a greater measure of tolerance both as to dogma and rite than its neighbours, and a fuller appreciation of the truth that rigid uniformity is not a necessary element in spiritual unity. On account of its geographical isolation, and its frequent excommunications, and perhaps also by reason of something in its temper, it preserved a native idiom in its worship even so late as the time of Queen Margaret and again of Edward I. The important fact, however, is not any peculiarity of local custom but the fact that for the mission of St. Columba and St. Ninian, for that Church which received its freedom as the *Ecclesia Scoticana*, which St. Margaret reformed and the saintly King David endowed, and which was the Church of our people throughout their heroic struggles, the essential service of the Lord's Day was not monastic mattins or any other edificatory or devotional rite than the Lord's Supper, the commemoration and worship of His own appointment. The central part of the rite might be obscured by accretions, just as Holy Tables, through mistaken piety, become cluttered with trifling ornaments, but still it remained for the pious the essential Communion, God meeting with man, man meeting with God, in the sacrament of divine institution.

When the Reformation of 1560 was accomplished, as has been proved beyond contention, the Lord's Day Morning Service as conceived by Calvin, Knox and the rest was still the Holy Communion. They never dreamed of inventing a new form of worship or putting the pulpit in the place of the Table. They rightly cleansed and purified the rite and restored preaching of the Word to its true place, but in face of our Lord's "This Do", they had not that temerity which could call upon the faithful to do something else. Indeed the form of service which has come down to us by the title of Knox's Liturgy and which was used in the Church till

1638, has as a Sunday Morning Service what is, in essence, a Communion Service with only so much omitted as belonged to an actual celebration which was to be added on the monthly occasions. Sunday worship in the early Reformed Church was Holy Communion or, when there was no actual consecration and distribution of elements, that series of devotional acts in which Communion was habitually shrined.

The events of 1638 swept away the Book of Common Order. It is interesting to note that it was not Morning Prayer but the Communion Office which Dean Hannay attempted to read in St Giles' Church from Laud's Prayer-book. The Scottish Church would have none of that book. Unfortunately the effects of Laud's efforts was to leave us, for the first time in our history, without a service-book of any kind. The Directory, when it came into being, conformed for the most part to the accustomed traditions of worship of the North, but its suppression of the office of Reader did serious harm. That act not only proved, in the event, fatal to daily prayers, but it also tended to the suppression of the lessons from Scripture. The minister thought it became his office rather to lecture than to read. In later times also the minister took liberties with the prayers which a Reader would not have taken, until worship lost all form and proper sequence. Devotions became a *cento* of Scriptural passages or disguised sermons of instruction. A large number of ministers, in Dr Robert Lee's words, prayed "extempore in the most absolute sense—plunging on each occasion into the great wilderness of thought and language—like Abraham who went forth not knowing whither he went". These exercises were prolonged to fifteen, twenty and even forty minutes.

The reformation of public worship in the nineteenth century was heralded perhaps by Thomas Wright, the author of "The Morning and Evening Sacrifice", whose conception of worship as not merely edificatory but as communion with God, and whose Catholic conception of the range of Christianity in relation to human nature and life, deserved better than the deposition he received. Dr Robert Lee might have received the same treatment for the use of his "Order of Public Worship" in Greyfriars Church had not a fatal fall from his horse in Princes Street saved him from that ignominy. The first edition of *Euchologion*, however, issued by the Church Service Society in 1867, and its subsequent editions, established, despite protests and some persecutions, the value of the reforming work. Full credit must also be

allowed to the publication, by the Aids to Devotion Committee of the General Assembly, of "Prayers for Social and Family Worship", in 1859. It disclaimed any intention of innovation where services were conducted by a minister or licentiate, but must have had its due influence upon the younger men. All these works naturally returned to the early Reformers for inspiration, the last-named taking its first morning service almost entirely from Knox's Liturgy. They were sparing of demanding a revival of the good practice of frequent Communion, but they restored the savour of a true liturgy and under their influence the Church has been guided towards the proper devotional sequence of a Communion office in its principal service of worship of the Lord's Day.

It is evident, we think, that a sustained diet of worship cannot properly consist of a series of devotional acts unrelated to each other and leading to no proper climax. It must have its proper sequence of parts, its own ascending rhythm, whereby it leads from the call to worship through confession and assurance of pardon, through instruction and response, to the clearest vision of the Divine, and thence to self-dedication to God and to His fullest purposes in the world. Thereafter it sends men forth to do His work with His great blessing upon them. It is also clear that the most unified and perfect service is one in which the Lord's own appointed Memorial is the climax of the whole. If it be necessary (we pray that necessity may disappear) that the culminating act of Christian worship should be foregone for long periods, at least we may make the main service of the week as similar to the Communion as possible. If we may not have "The Remembrance", we can have a remembrance of "The Remembrance", an assurance to ourselves that what the Holy Sacrament declares is true, and an oblation and thanksgiving made in the spirit of Holy Sacrament. For this purpose it is wise if some part of the service after the sermon is conducted from the Holy Table and if the Blessing is given there. Rightly considered, this will help to make it visible that the Table, the true symbol of our Lord and of His sacrifice, is central in the worship of His House.

It is also needful that the sequence of the service and its meaning should be known to the people. It is their due to understand what is done and why. An occasional reference in sermons to such topics is not misplaced, and the parish magazine affords scope for instruction on worship. An official publication is, however, a desideratum. From the

Aids to Devotion Committee a book would be welcomed which, without imposing a liturgy might help the people to follow divine service with intelligence, and, instead of merely hearing prayers, to pray. It is an imperfect conception of the priesthood of the laity which expects them to be merely auditors at common worship. The Scottish "Form of Church Government" declares it to be the office of the pastor to "pray for and with his flock as the mouth of the people unto God". Until we have made it possible for him to do so, we have still much to accomplish to be true to the best elements of our Scottish tradition.

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