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13 1.
“The assembling of ourselves together:”

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE EAST CHURCH,

On SABBATH, 24th January, 1858.

BY THE

REV. JOHN MARSHALL LANG,

Minister of the East Parish, Aberdeen.

WITH AN APPENDIX.

ABERDEEN:

JOHN SMITH, 50, UNION STREET;

D. WYLLIE & SON;

AND THE OTHER BOOKSELLERS.

1858.



“THE ASSEMBLING OF OURSELVES TOGETHER.”

HEB. x. 25.

“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together.”

THE words which I have read form part of a beautiful and touching exhortation. In the previous portion of his epistle, St. Paul has proved that Christ, our great High Priest, has, by one offering, perfected for ever them that are sanctified; that, by the sacrifice of Himself, He hath put away sin, and thus obtained eternal redemption for us. As the result of this, His oblation and intercession, all obstacles in the way of unreserved intercourse with the Father have been removed—we are at liberty to repair with boldness unto the throne of grace. Under the old economy, the high priest alone could approach the place where the Divine presence was symbolized. But that dispensation of exclusiveness, the apostle reminds us, had passed away. It had fulfilled its purpose; it had prefigured and prepared for the good things to come. The type was no longer necessary, for the Antitype had been revealed. All things

had become new. From the lips of the Divine Man had been heard the highest breathing of the human spirit, "Abba Father"; and the blessed name, "Father," as applicable to the Highest, He had imprinted upon the heart and put into the mouth of His own. Henceforth, in the realization of this Fatherhood, a new and living way has been consecrated for us. Through the rending of the Redeemer's flesh upon Calvary, the vail that separated between the Divine and the human has been drawn aside, and, unfettered by legal enactments, we are invited to enter—not merely into the holy place, but into the very holy of holies. And, saith the sacred writer, "Let us, my brethren, avail ourselves of this privilege. With the frank and trustful simplicity of children let us hold communion with God; and, rejoicing in that glorious liberty to which we have been introduced, let us hold fast, yea, even without faltering, the blessed hope into which we have been baptized. 'He is faithful who hath promised,'—and if we are but steadfast in our loyalty to Him He will not forsake us. In this confidence let us behold our encouragement; and, although, in the world we suffer tribulation, let us be of good cheer; let us recall the blessed assurances of our blessed Master; 'let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works.' And, farther, bearing in mind that this strengthening is effected by saint meeting with saint, heart speaking to heart, let us not

forsake, even when dangers are imminent, 'the assembling of ourselves together.' Some timid or worldly Christians neglect such seasons of exhortation and incitement. But be it not so with us. 'The night is far spent, the day is at hand;' let us, therefore, with increased diligence, employ those means within our reach of animating our hope and intensifying our love for Him who hath redeemed us with His blood. Be not wilfully absent from the gatherings of the faithful."

Thus wrote the Apostle Paul in the first age of the Christian Church. The assemblies to which he refers are, clearly, those held for the worship of the Christian's Lord, and for the maintenance of Christian fellowship. The accounts handed down to us of these meetings are deeply interesting and instructive. They show us how simple, how truthful, how genuine was that early communion. How touching is the description given of it in the book of the Acts of the Apostles—"They, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart: praising God, and having favour with the people." This was the first expression of the Christian community. The Church wore, in its completeness, the aspect of a family. The apostles, alone distinguished above the others, were the centre of influence and authority. In their doctrine and fellowship they that received the Word continued. And the wor-

ship of such was twofold. They still retained their interest in the temple, and even in its service they joined. But their intercourse was chiefly maintained by more private meetings in each other's houses. Then and there did they engage in appropriate acts of devotion; and, together, they partook of the brotherly meal, which was closed and hallowed by the celebration of the blessed Sacrament of the Supper. A fellowship so close and peculiar could not, however, long endure. The necessity of a more formal constitution was soon felt and acted upon; the opposition of the Jews increasing in virulence, the followers of Jesus were compelled to detach themselves from their countrymen and assume the position of a distinct society; and to give consistency to their worship a model or form was sought for in the Jewish Synagogue. Thus originated and thus conducted, the gatherings of them that believed were frequent. Occasionally, in towns or districts they had fixed places of assembly. Yet, often it was, as indicated in the reply made by one of their number to a question of the Roman Prefect—"We assemble where each man can and will." The first day of the week, instead of the Jewish Sabbath, was their great weekly festival; and, as preparatory to it, as well as commemorative of another aspect of redemption, each Friday, sometimes in addition each Wednesday, was set apart as a day of humiliation and prayer. The first day was regarded

with joy as devoted to the memory of the Resurrection; the other was designed to keep in perpetual remembrance the agony of Gethsemane and the cross of Calvary. Then, the Christians met for prayer and fasted until the afternoon. Thus it was that Christ Jesus crucified and risen was kept continually before them. They were alway reminded of what He had done and suffered, and what He now lives and reigns to accomplish. And by the Holy Sacraments which He instituted, and which pledged and conveyed to them the truth of His presence in their midst, they were confirmed and nourished and built up in the faith. Their labours and lives prove that these assemblings of themselves together did "provoke unto love and good works." And, not without reason, therefore, did the apostle caution the Hebrews against allowing apprehensions of danger or worldly considerations to disturb or break this outward communion.

My brethren, what was true in respect of the Church *then*, is true of the Church *still*. The promise upon which she relied in the first is the same as that upon which she relies in the nineteenth century. The gracious assurance is still ours—"Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." And were we as "full of the Holy Ghost and of faith," as were they who assembled in the upper rooms, the results, in our case, of coming

together in the name of the Lord would be equally great and precious. For in this our house of prayer He is present. We who plead His loving declaration are invited to remember that He is truly with us; with us through His Spirit possessing our hearts; with us in His Word brought home to our consciences; with us in the devotions which we render, the prayers we offer, and the praises we sing; with us in His holy sacraments, the means whereby He refreshes, and quickens, and nourishes the soul. And why is His presence thus vouchsafed? That He may bless us—bless us in the enlargement of our souls, in the enkindling of holy desires, in the shedding abroad in our hearts of His own love, in the elevation of our spirits to a real and living communion with His, in the enlightenment of our minds in the knowledge, to the end that we may grow in the love of the truth. This is the result of all truthful worship. Christians are thereby reminded of their one Lord, and hope, and faith, and baptism. Their congregations are adapted to confirm believers, to bid the drooping be of good comfort, to point the weary and heavy-laden to the one and only rest, to invite the careless to a throne of grace, to minister unto each and all of the fulness of grace and truth that is in Christ Jesus. And therefore are they to be observed by all the faithful; therefore is it at our peril that we neglect or despise them. They

are the means which the Great Master hath appointed for His people's growth in grace. True it is, indeed, that independently of them, He abides with and in the love-informed heart; and even without their aid, increase can be made in the Christian stature. But we are not at liberty to look for this unless we are *deprived* of His ordinances. When provision is made for the Christian assembly, they who turn from it both wrong themselves and do despite unto the Spirit of Grace. I am persuaded that no true Christian will neglect the place of worship. Rather will joy be felt when it is said, "Go up unto the house of the Lord." For who that realizes the blessedness of joining in services that point upward to the heavenly sanctuary; who that desires to be found in and to hold intercourse with the unseen Saviour; who, with a soul whose inspiration is gratitude, and whose voice is prayer, is not ready to exclaim—"How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts!" "A day in Thy courts is better than a thousand!" Brethren, there is little spiritual life where there is no sympathy with this language. It is only the worldling, the formalist, the nominal Christian who will forsake the assembling together.

For to go back, why, let me ask, why do we thus assemble? Is it to comply with a mere conventionalism? Or is it to perform an unmeaning ceremony? Or is it to listen only to the efforts of human eloquence?

Need I say that it is upon no one of these accounts that we are to-day convened ; if from pure and proper motives we have entered this sacred building. Those filled with the true Christian spirit have not met simply because it is customary so to meet. They have met in the belief that, by so doing, they comply with an ordinance of the Church and of the Church's Head, and avail themselves of a blessed arrangement for the cultivation and expression of true Christian sympathy. Nor yet have they had in view the observance of empty rites, the engagement in acts significant only to the morbid sentimentalist, or shrouded in so much that is mysterious, that it is impossible fully to understand them. Their desire, their object, has been to unite with their brethren in prayer and praise—in the utterance of the common confession—the breathing of the common supplication—the rendering of the common thanksgiving—the pondering over the common record of truth—the service of their common Lord. And thus another and a higher thought was present to them than the mere listening to what man should say. Not from curiosity to hear a favourite preacher ; nor with the intent of pronouncing upon the merits of a discourse ; but from the wish to be where the Divine name is specially recorded, and where the Divine blessing is specially promised, and with the resolution to pay their vows unto the Lord in the presence of His people, have

faithful and loving worshippers come up unto this house. And such a service is only the natural expression of the believer's inner life. It grows out of it. In whomsoever that life is developed the prompting is felt towards this communion. The love begotten in the soul, by the realization of Christ, embraces all who bear His name. It gives birth to a desire to draw closer in sympathy and purpose to them. It suggests the considering and exhorting of one another. It points to prayer as the result and bond of the sympathy thus awakened. Remembering that all stand in need of the one mercy, the craving is, that all should join in the one acknowledgment of unworthiness and petition for pardon. Conscious, at the same time, that the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin, and that a new and living way has been consecrated for us through His sacrifice, the song of praise is indicated as the mode of giving relief to the gratitude that glows within the heart. And, farther, owning the impulse of the holy affection which has transformed the spirit, a longing is felt to have Christian energy stimulated and faith increased by solemn perusal of the oracles of truth and earnest meditation upon the message they convey. Thus it is that true hearts are drawn together. Christian worship is not the result of artificial excitement; nor is it the yielding to meaningless demands. It is the development of the Christ-filled consciousness: it is

the dictate of the Christ-tending soul. And none who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity will forsake the legitimate assembling of themselves together.

My brethren, let me, by dwelling upon the purpose or object of this assembling, move you to attend to the apostolic injunction. If I can show you that in the sanctuary *you* have a part to perform, and that the performance of *your* part is essential to its service, I feel assured that you will at once recognize the obligation under which you are laid to unite with your fellow-Christians in their public devotions. We meet then—to express much in a brief sentence—we meet to *worship God in Christ*. Let not this, I pray you, be overlooked. I fear that, amongst us, it is too much lost sight of. He who searcheth the heart alone knoweth what hath inclined each one now before me to come here this afternoon. The interpretation of motives belongeth not to man. Yet is it beyond the mark of truth to say that many now present have a very imperfect, if not a very unworthy, idea of the end to be served and the benefit to be derived by their coming together? Is it not the case that multitudes meet from Sabbath to Sabbath hardly knowing or caring for the why or wherefore they meet?—that many of those who refuse to be thus classed have before them only the hearing of a sermon, which to them is nothing more than an effort of intellect or a proof of talent?—and that

others, even seriously and properly disposed, attach exclusive weight to the preaching of the Word? You are asked upon the Saturday, "Whom do you intend to *hear* to-morrow?" You are asked upon the Monday, "Whom did you *hear* yesterday?" as if *hearing* was the sole duty of a Christian people, and nothing save the public exhortation needed be thought of by the Christian minister. And so, too, what question is more frequent than this—"Were you pleased with that sermon?—did you like that clergyman?"—words which almost seem to imply that, in the view of the interrogator, his part is to sit as a critic, and the part of him who speaks is to consult the tastes and inclinations of his hearers, instead of boldly and faithfully proclaiming the message wherewith he is entrusted. And what does all this appear to intimate? Is not the conclusion to be gathered from it, that the grand privilege, yea, the fundamental conception of worship, is, by many, wholly lost sight of? Far, very far be it from me to underrate the institution of preaching. It is the royal ordinance of the kingdom; and, because it is so, I claim for it a higher place than that of being judged or thought of as a mere literary exertion. It is the agency which Christ himself has appointed and the Spirit of Truth has sanctified for pouring into the soul those pure and holy thoughts which find their centre in Jesus, for winning sinners from the error of

their way, for instructing and building up believers in their most holy faith. To teach, to warn, to counsel, to implore, in the name and stead of Christ—not to present those whom he addresses with a display of rhetoric, is the office of the truthful preacher. And as a message, a warning, or an entreaty, the word spoken is to be received into the heart, that it may produce the fruit of a holy life. But all this granted, a yet higher truth is to be kept in view. The *sermon* is not the *service*. It is only a part of it, and not to be regarded as the only part of importance. Brethren, every worshipper, if in Christ, is a king and priest unto God the Father; and, as a priest, he has a sacrifice to offer. The presentation of the sacrifice, indeed, is not limited to time or place. His is to be a life-long and a never-ceasing oblation. The gifts which he has to offer are spiritual, and the altar upon which he has to lay them is a renewed and love-pervaded heart. “Pray without ceasing;” “Be not weary in well-doing,”—these are the precepts of revelation. But very specially is he called to pay his vows when those associated with him in this priesthood assemble together. Hence the *public prayer*, in which all, with one heart and with one voice, approach the heavenly throne—*each* pleading for *all*, and *all* pleading for *each*. Do not, I entreat you, weaken the force of this sublimest of thoughts. *Yours*, dear friends, not mine—mine only in so far as I

am one with you—*yours* are the petitions and supplications which have this day ascended to the Majesty on high. My work here is twofold:—1st, In the name of God and as His ambassador to declare His will; and 2d, To act as your mouthpiece and representative. In this latter capacity, I give audible expression to the breathings of Christian consciousness, the sighings of the contrite heart, the entreaties of the truth-seeking soul. But remember in and by all this *you* are praying. You are not the *hearers*, but the *suppliants*; you are drawing near to, you are holding communion with, the unseen Answerer of Prayer. Call you this nothing? Of what privilege more glorious and yet more solemn can we conceive? What more expressive of the membership of all believers in the one body; what more elevating, more invigorating, more sanctifying than this blessed exercise? And is it worthless or powerless? Hear what the Lord says:—"If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any one thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven." The Christian might part with all else, but he could not part with the *social prayer*. It is the *principal part of worship*. And only next to it is that of *praise*—the lifting up of the voice in holy song, the ascribing unto Father, Son, and Holy Ghost the glory that is due, the making melody in the heart and by the lips unto the Lord. This assuredly pertains

to the ministry of the entire Christian priesthood. It ought to be, it will be, in the case of every true believer, his highest delight to celebrate the majesty, the mercy, the love of his King and God. And the more deep the harmony between the soul and the soul's Redeemer, the more precious will this service be. The saints in bliss are represented as singing "a new song," as clothed in white robes, bearing palms in their hands, and crying with a loud voice, as singing the "song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb." And thus are we reminded that praise is the pursuit, I had almost said the life, of the highest saintliness. Only let us realize this; only let us feel that our feeble hymns blend with the hallelujahs of that choir which no man can number, that it is when we give utterance to the emotions and desires of redeemed hearts, that we prove most fully our citizenship with those now before the throne;—only let us bear this in view, and how touching, as well as exalted, becomes the service of song! Brethren, are we able to say, "Christ hath loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood?" Why, then, should any of us refuse to take part in the offering of praise: why should any one "neglect to swell the burst of holy song;" why should any one sit, callous and unconcerned, when exhorted to laud and magnify the Lord our God? Often has it been put—"We read of no silent voices in heaven. Why, then, should *their*

voices be silent who are looking, and preparing, and travelling heavenwards?" Praise is the occupation of the myriad myriads who throng the courts above,—praise waiteth for God in the Zion below.

To these, the two last mentioned parts of worship, it is not unnecessary to advert. Amongst us a very imperfect conception is cherished of their true significance. We do not bring into sufficient prominence—we do not invest with sufficient interest the devotional element in the sanctuary service. What we want, what we need, is a deeper and a richer devotion. I would not depart from the simplicity of our form of worship. To those accustomed to a more gorgeous ritual it may appear naked; but one who has been taught to connect it with all that is great and precious in his country's past—with the struggles of heroes and the endurance of martyrs—will hesitate before even speaking in disparagement of it. But why not give that simplicity its beauty? Why allow it to be marred by spots and blemishes? Why, when without the sacrifice of, without even clashing with a single principle, we can remove what is acknowledged to be inconsistent, and supplement what is defective,—why are we satisfied with talking, and deploring, and apologising, and meanwhile refuse to act? Is it not our part, ought it not to be our endeavour to improve and amend what upon the very face of it is faulty in our time-honoured prac-

tice? And, brethren, the very respects in which we fail are connected with our prayer and praise. Who has not often felt that much may be done to render them more worthy of the name? In regard to the one, is it not sometimes forgotten, both by minister and people, what prayer is? A laboured harangue upon the attributes of Deity—a theological dissertation—a cold and empty setting forth of the doctrines of Christianity—does not this often pass by the name of prayer? And those who avowedly come to pray are to be found standing to listen without any thought of participating in the solemn exercise, or any idea that their true position is that of sinners met to implore the Divine mercy and grace. A congregation in the act of prayer is, alas! not unfrequently a melancholy spectacle. The upright posture, the wandering eye, the unconcerned demeanour, all bespeak either a carelessness or ignorance as to that in which they are engaged; whilst the lengthy, tedious, and inappropriate *addresses* heard, instead of evoking, chill devotion. Surely spots such as these are not ineffaceable. And, in regard to praise; better and higher forms, indeed, than those with which we were wont to be satisfied we now have. Yet how feebly and partially joined in is the service. There is little of heartiness; there is much of heartlessness manifest regarding it. The voices that should contribute to the melody are silent; those who should rejoice in

the call to extol the Lord are listlessly and indolently seated in their pews. How different the aspect of such an assembly from that of the glorified in heaven. Day and night, in the city which hath no need of the sun, theirs is the service of never-ending, ever-triumphant praise.

My brethren, what I have referred to ought not to be. Our worship should be truthful and real. It should harmonize with the realities to which its different acts have reference; and be so conducted that all may be impressed with the solemnity and blessedness of their approach unto God. At this it is the duty of every one called to lead the Church's devotions to aim; and without infringing upon either act or rule much may be done. Upon this subject I do not presume to enlarge. But one or two propositions I have to make which may, in part at least, obtain the desired result. In general, we have two marked offerings of prayer; the one after the singing of the first psalm, and the other at the close of the sermon. The first of these, properly speaking, begins the service. The psalm which precedes it was originally introduced that, when the summons to call upon the Lord was made, every worshipper might be prepared without hindrance to draw near to the throne. For the same reason it is still retained. When all are then assembled we shall read, chiefly from the Book of Psalms, a portion or portions of Scripture adapted to

the circumstances in which we are placed, or breathing forth the feelings and desires of the contrite and loving soul. And, then, presenting ourselves "before the Lord our God with confession of our sins and offences," we shall crave His forgiveness and entreat for acceptance and grace in the Beloved. A slight change in the order followed will, then, be caused by the transposition of the other prayer. As it at present is, its chief part is intercession; and to this, a very solemn duty and precious privilege, I am called when mind and body are alike wearied, and, in consequence of previous effort, it is sometimes difficult so to speak as to be heard. I propose, therefore, that our pleading for others should follow, after a short interval, our pleading for ourselves. That interval we shall employ in blessing the name of our God. Comforting ourselves by reading in His Holy Word of His long-suffering and love—we, who have faithfully implored His compassion, will make mention of His goodness, and give expression to our gratitude in heartfelt praise. And at the close of the supplication specified, the course which we will pursue will be as hitherto after the first prayer; a petition for the Divine blessing upon the word preached, occupying the place of the more lengthened entreaty, which usually succeeds the sermon. So much regarding the order and character of our service. One remark, farther, I have to make. Is the posture at present assumed either

the natural or truthful one? We *stand* at *prayer* and *sit* at *praise*. For the first of these modes we have a show of scriptural authority, and even the primitive Church recognized it. But this is to be observed: standing, by the early Christians, was connected only with thanksgiving. When they acknowledged their unworthiness and implored Divine mercy they humbly knelt. And kneeling is assuredly the natural and becoming attitude. Might we not, brethren, instead of the present custom, if we cannot bow the knee at least bend reverently forward in our pews? Much of that irreverent gazing and those irreverent positions characteristic of so many worshippers would thus be avoided; whilst I am persuaded that those who sincerely, and, in the spirit of prayer, participated in the devotion, would thus be enabled to have their minds more absorbed in the sacred exercise. And, in reference to praise; our present practice is utterly indefensible. With truth has it been said, by a minister of our own Church: "Sitting is a Westminster fruit. It is not Scottish or Presbyterian; what is more, it is not scriptural. Scripture teems with instances of standing at praise and kneeling at prayer; but there is not one solitary proof of sitting during either act of public worship." So striking did this fact appear when stated to his congregation, that, although not requested to do so, at the first appropriate act, they rose in a body and caused the church to ring



with the praises of Jehovah as it had never rung before. And, certainly no arguments are necessary to recommend and enforce it.

Why, it may be asked, why dwell upon these matters, as if importance were attachable to them? Why, in regard to them, deviate from what is most frequently observed? As respects this latter interrogatory, let me observe, and I pray you to mark the observation, that if ought of what I have proposed or suggested were unconstitutional or implied a departure from a system which every minister of our Church has sworn to uphold, it would be worse than presumptuous to introduce and attempt it. But when no principle is involved, when no law is violated, when an obvious improvement can be effected without directly or indirectly aiming at the prejudice or subversion of the existing government or discipline; then not only are we at liberty, but, I conceive, necessity is laid upon us to do whatsoever lies in our power to render our sanctuary service "a delight, the holy of the Lord and honourable." And let it not be thought that the points on which I have enlarged are unworthy of the attention which has been directed to them. "If the minister," I have somewhere read, "were ashamed to particularize in these things, he were not fit to be a minister; but he holds the rule that nothing is little in God's service. If it once have the honour of that name, it grows great

instantly." *That* is the truth—" *Nothing is little in God's service.*" In ordinary matters, it is a rule, whose wisdom we all recognise, that whatever is worth doing is worth doing well. And much more, is it not true that when we worship God, we should do so in the way and by the means best adapted to the end contemplated? Moreover, I am desirous to attach greater importance to devotion in our meetings together; that thus not only may there be no valid excuse for forsaking the assemblies of the saints, but that every one who, in a proper spirit, claims the privileges of the house of prayer, may be able to say:—

"I have been there, and still would go;

'Tis like a little heaven below."

APPENDIX.

IN the Sermon to which the following remarks are appended my object is to direct attention to the truthful idea of worship, and, in especial, to point out the significance of public prayer and praise. In pursuance of this design, I have endeavoured, without exaggeration, to set forth the teaching of Scripture; to enlarge upon the duty which devolves upon all Christians as forming "a royal priesthood;" and to indicate what seems inconsistent with the hearty acknowledgment of this obligation in the practice largely adhered to within the pale of the Church of Scotland, and other Presbyterian Churches. The Discourse was not prepared with a view to publication; but so many mis-statements and perversions have been circulated regarding it, that I have thought it well, by sending it forth, to show all disposed to investigate its contents that I have spoken only "the words of truth and soberness." And I gladly avail myself of the opportunity thus afforded to notice, at greater length, some of the points therein adverted to, and to furnish explanations which, I trust, will remove any difficulty that may have been suggested by it.

It will be observed that I expressly disclaim any wish to deviate from "the simplicity of our form of worship." That simplicity, indeed, I greatly admire. To my own mind it is the most pleasing feature in our ecclesiastical system.

Firmly and conscientiously attached as I am to the Presbyterianism of our church, I should look with jealousy upon any movement tending either to its prejudice or subversion. Far, therefore, from attempting to encroach upon or alter its practice, my sole desire is to bring into prominent relief the beauty of our service and its admirable adaptation to the wants and desires of the sincere and truthful worshipper. When properly conducted and properly understood, I believe it to be a most appropriate expression of the Christian's inner life. It is not encumbered by "vain repetitions," nor does it afford room for superstitious observances; it grows, as all worship should, out of the innermost longings and feelings of the soul. And it is only the conviction of this its suitability to promote the end and object of the Christian assembly, that has induced me humbly to attempt to remove what are acknowledged on all hands to be "spots and blemishes." So far as personal ease and comfort are concerned, it were unquestionably better to let what is alone. But I have only to repeat what has been elsewhere put—"when no principle is involved, when no law is violated, when an obvious improvement can be effected without directly or indirectly aiming at the prejudice or subversion of the existing government and discipline, then not only are we at liberty, but, I conceive, necessity is laid upon us to do whatsoever lies in our power to render our Sanctuary service 'a delight, the holy of the Lord and honourable.'" In other words, I am desirous to detach from our present form and practice what is incongruous or foreign to it.

That, in the respects noticed in the Sermon, there is room for amendment in the ministrations of many amongst us cannot be denied. The too prevalent notion of worship is that expressed by the Rev. Mr. Binney of London,* "The mo-

* A Non-conforming Minister.

dern minister is to be a preacher; a Luther thundering against abuses, or a Whitfield converting multitudes—people are to assemble to *hear*—but the worship of the faithful who neither need to be converted nor reformed has been lost sight of.”... “The modern preacher is very often too much of a lecturer; and the chapel or church is too much regarded and attended as a lecture-room.” That this mode of thought does obtain in our midst is matter of notoriety; and it is not to be wondered at. The provision for worship in our houses of prayer has been, and, in many places, still is lamentably meagre. A sermon, a long sermon, and nothing but a sermon—this is the principle which has hitherto received a large share of popular acceptance. The other parts of public devotion have been systematically subordinated to the exhortation. Until recently it was of little consequence by whom or in what form the “service of song” was conducted. No meaning was apparently attached to it, save that it gave a few moments relief to the clergyman and people before and after the Discourse. Upon the *prayers offered* it is unnecessary to enlarge. It is sufficient to remark that they were, and often yet are *preachings* so lengthened as to weary, and so confused as to chill the devotion of the humble and contrite. The reading of the Holy Scriptures, so expressly enforced in the Church’s Directory, has been too often “compressed into a corner”; while from the lips of many a minister has never been heard the prayer of prayers—that which the Heavenly Master taught his disciples. These and other that might be specified are unquestionably spots in the sun. Every one capable of taking an impartial view feels and knows that they ought not to be. And yet there is a reluctance on the part of many, there is a strong aversion on the part of some to do ought with the view of remedying any cause for such complaint. The reason of this is to be found in the belief

that such faults are part and parcel of Presbyterianism ; that they cannot be done away with without trespassing upon the order by it sanctioned ; and that, therefore, in consideration of the good which more than counterbalances the defects and errors, it is prudent and proper to refrain from any attempt to rectify and amend. But what is the fact ? *The inconsistencies adverted to have nothing to do with, are in no way chargeable to, are, in reality, deviations from Presbyterianism.* This is known by every one at all acquainted with its history and constitution. I have before me the service of Calvin and the early Church of Geneva. It is most beautiful, most simple, and most Scriptural. It embraces all that is essential to or involved in the idea of public worship. The prayers of the great Reformer, as they have come down to us, are distinguished by richness of devotional thought and feeling ; and not the least interesting feature connected with them is that his prayer of confession “is to be traced in all the reformed liturgies, and even in the Anglican prayer book, where it will be found with some alterations.” It was in his worship, too, that psalmody first assumed the prominence in the reformed churches to which it is entitled. The Psalms, says one, “are the responsive part of Calvin’s liturgy. These choral services embodied the acts of adoration, praise, and thanksgiving, which are scarcely noticed in the forms of prayer ; while, in the latter, the offices of intercession, supplication, and teaching, were confined to the minister alone. The prayers, by constant use, made familiar to the people, were to be followed silently and in subdued tones ; the psalms and hymns constitute their audible utterance in the sacred ministrations.”* And it deserves to be remarked, as illustrative of the influence which the “Father of Presbyterianism” has exerted that, from him, the practice of congregational

* The Rev. Mr. Baird’s (Presbyterian Minister, New York) “Eutaxia.”

singing was borrowed alike by the Church of England and the Church of Scotland. His order of worship I cannot omit to notice. He began by reading the appointed chapters of the Holy Scriptures with the Ten Commandments. Then the minister, having called upon the people to follow in heart his words, made confession of sin, and offered petitions for mercy. This done, the congregation united in singing an appropriate psalm ; which concluded, prayer was again engaged in, and the Divine blessing specially invoked to the end that the " Word might be faithfully expounded to the honour of His name and the edification of the Church." The public exhortation was then proceeded with. At the close, the congregation once more approached the heavenly throne and presented their supplications and intercession ; and the service was closed, save when the holy communion was administered, with the Lord's prayer, the creed, the benediction, and the touching pastoral—" Depart in peace, remember the poor, and the God of peace be with you." I may add that praise was ever rendered *standing*, and prayer was offered *kneeling*. I have also before me the the service adopted and recommended by our own reformer—" John Knox." Born though he was for troublous times, and devoid of the qualifications for conducting public devotion so conspicuous in Calvin, he was yet profoundly impressed with the blessedness of the Christian assembly, and earnestly desired to institute a Scriptural and truthful form of worship. With this view, he arranged the order and character of the public prayers, and provided for the reading of the Scriptures, for the offering of praise, and for the Christian sermon. His ritual has been described as " little less beautiful and impressive than that of England, long used by the devout congregations of the national Church, never interdicted, and not only worth resumption, but in all respects calculated to improve the

service." * And, lastly, I refer to our own Directory of Public Worship. This Directory was compiled as a substitute for the Book of Common Prayer, which had, at least for seven years (from 1557-1564), "occasioned many godly and learned men to rejoice." It was the attempt to thrust upon clergy and people another ritual—that of Laud—that aroused the wrath of the Scottish nation, and led it summarily to reject the form of worship which had been for a short time previously employed. In its room the Divines of Scotland, assisted by those of England, drew up, and Parliament gave legal force to, a Directory, whose meaning was that "the general heads, the sense and scope of the prayers, and other parts of public worship being known to all, there might be a consent of all the churches in those things that contain the substance of the service and worship of God." Its object, thus, avowedly, was to indicate the parts of worship, and their "sense and scope." This Directory is still binding—indeed it is the only authority possessed by the Scottish Church. And it expressly provides for the behaviour of the congregation in the public worship of God—for the reading of the Holy Scriptures—for the public prayers—for the congregational psalmody, and for the preaching of the Word. It recommends that the minister begin with prayer for "pardon, assistance, and acceptance in the whole service then to be performed;" it enjoins "the reading, when convenient, of one chapter of each Testament at every meeting, and sometimes more when the chapters be short, or the coherence of matter requireth it; the full confession of sin with shame and holy confusion of face, and calling upon the Lord to this effect; intercession for the Church of Christ, for all in authority, for all pastors, for the

* John Knox's Book of Common Order, edited by the Rev.
Dr. Cumming.

commonalty, and for all whom it is incumbent to remember in prayer; for the use of the prayer which Christ taught His disciples, because not only a pattern of prayer, but itself a most comprehensive prayer." Such, according to the standard of our Church—not only still in force, but specially recommended to her clergy and people by the General Assembly two years ago—such are the "things" that contain the substance and service of the worship of God.

I presume that all Presbyterians will acknowledge that Calvin, Knox, and the Directory of Public Worship are authorities upon the subject of government and practice. And if so, how conclusive is the testimony borne! Not only are the slovenliness, irregularity, and undevoutness already commented upon, in no way connected with the polity to which we adhere, but that polity itself gives forth the most indignant and eloquent protest against them. Nay, more, in Presbyterianism we not only have allowance made, but we have the most ample material, for a deep and rich, although simple, devotion. We do not need to borrow from the service of a Church, differing in point of constitution from our own; we can go back to, and claim as ours, the source whence that service drew much of what invests it with its acknowledged beauty. We have customs venerable both on account of their age and intrinsic worth; we have "heir-looms of the past" which it would be well for us more closely to study, and, by conforming to whose spirit, our worship would acquire additional power and vigour. Our having departed from the system of "Presbytery," in its purer days, is traceable to two causes;—first, to the attempt, so perseveringly made, to force upon a reluctant people a justly detested liturgy—a liturgy pervaded throughout by the genius of Popery, and closely approximating to the Romish missal. It is matter of little surprise that an earnest and high-minded people should, in

the zeal thus awakened against an un-Protestant ritual, rush to an opposite extreme, and discard what was not only proper in itself, but was embodied in the institution which they loved.* But another circumstance which, afterwards, tended to denationalize the Scottish Church, was the close fellowship which sprung up between it and the English Puritans. To that fellowship we are indebted for much that is truly valuable—for our Catechisms and our Confession of Faith. Yet it cannot be doubted that the good obtained was not without alloy. Notions were then introduced and practices, such as sitting during praise, were then adopted, which were not Scottish or Presbyterian. It is not to the days posterior to 1647 that we must look to discover what the Church of Scotland truly was. "Our Reformers, and the Church of the Reformation, not the Covenanters, are our best models." The feeling which has hitherto prevailed against any approach to the orderliness and devoutness characteristic of the true Presbyterian system, is the consequence of these events. But why should the prejudices which have given it the aspect of unreasonableness and obstinacy be longer cherished? Why should we persist in a blind attachment to what we know to be essentially an *innovation* upon the true and ancient practice? Why should we break off from the communion of Calvin and Knox, when unprovided with any excuse; when, in fact, by breaking off, we prove traitors to the polity upon which our beloved Church is founded.

The foregoing statements will at once relieve me from a twofold charge sometimes made. They will prove that my feeble attempt "to attach greater importance to devotion in our meetings together," can be traced neither to presumption

* The morbid terror for everything approaching to form grew out of the "unjustifiable efforts of Laud and his Master to force a justly obnoxious liturgy on a free people."—*Edinburgh Review*, April, 1852.

nor to a love of innovation. I would not have dared to propose what I had no other authority for proposing than my own feelings or sense of propriety ; still less would I have been foolhardy enough to suggest ought offensive to, or inconsistent with, Presbyterian worship. Earnestly and anxiously have I satisfied myself as to the tenableness of the position assumed. Instead of wishing to *change*, I wish to restore our practice to its original truthfulness. Instead of contravening the law of the Church, I am endeavouring to bring our doings into closer conformity to that law. Instead of recommending what seemed good to my own eye, every part of the proposed service is in harmony with, and closely follows, the service of Calvin, and that marked out in the Directory. Instead of borrowing from or pointing towards Episcopacy, I am endeavouring to render our Presbyterianism thoroughly and truly Presbyterian. And, to prove that in that contemplated there is no violation of ecclesiastical law or rule, it will suffice to state, that our only recognized authority—the repeatedly mentioned Directory—not only does not forbid, but expressly affords liberty to do all and more than all that I have indicated. As already stated, this is its own setting forth—“*our meaning therein being only that the general heads, the sense and scope of the prayers and other parts of public worship being known to all, there may be a consent in all the Churches in those things that contain the substance of the service and worship of God.*” Thus it appears that, instead of binding to any one order, its whole aim is to mark out what must be embraced in the order adopted. And, to make it still further manifest that it does not interfere with such efforts as those in which I am concerned, it exhorts each one “by meditation, by taking heed to himself and the flock of God committed to him, and by wisely observing the ways of Divine Providence, to be careful to furnish his heart and

tongue with *further or other* materials of prayer and exhortation as shall be needful upon all occasions." Through-out, indeed, the manner or order is left, as, in its own words, "to the liberty of the minister as God shall direct and enable him, in piety and wisdom, to discharge his duty;" provided as a matter of course, that "the substance of the service" is retained. Therefore, not only is there nothing illegal in the attempt to come closer to the truthful model, but there is much in the tone and language of the Directory to encourage it. And this must be observed; when the effect of successfully carrying out such an attempt is to introduce a completer harmony between the authorized guide and the existing practice, the Church must be regarded as lending her sanction and bidding her son "God speed." That this may be predicated of what I have suggested in the Sermon, I do not think it necessary formally to prove. If any one is dubious I would only ask him to "read and compare."

It may seem strange to allude to the posture becoming prayer and praise. Yet so reluctant are many to acknowledge the propriety of doing otherwise than as at present, that, in reference to this topic, "line must be upon line, precept upon precept." In the Sermon, I have said that "kneeling is assuredly the natural and becoming attitude in prayer." This position it is needless to defend. With those who can dispute it, it were hopeless to argue. The idea which seems to possess most minds is, not that this statement is untrue, but that kneeling is essentially Episcopal. This is one of the cries raised by those who, unable to reason because without reason upon their side, take refuge in meaningless, haphazard assertions. But in the present instance, it is as false as it is meaningless. One fact will place this beyond the reach of denial. *In the Church of Calvin the posture of the people was that of kneeling; and*

upon the Genevan form John Knox's was closely modelled. In consequence of the wretched arrangement of the pews in most of our churches, it would be difficult to make provision for universally kneeling. And yet it might often be easily effected. In any case, a reverent bending forward in the pew, without rising up, would be infinitely more in correspondence with the sacred exercise than the undevout position at present generally assumed. In regard to praise, I have only to say that sitting, if not *anti*, is at least unscriptural. Indeed, it is "utterly indefensible." The man who would endeavour to bolster it up deserves credit for his hardihood and love of paradox. A custom so unworthy, it is some consolation to know, is wholly opposed to the genius and practice of pure Presbyterianism. And it is alien to the Church of Scotland. In words quoted in the Sermon, "it is a Westminster fruit." What is thus not of us, it is to be hoped will very soon be abandoned by us.

Many, however, are ready to concede all that has been advanced, and yet have doubts and fears as to any movement bearing a resemblance to that indicated. Their bugbear is *Popery*, or at least *black Prelacy*. Suggest any improvement, they are ready with the reply :—"It may be very true ; but it is better to refrain—better to let be what is, than run the risk of approaching, in even the smallest degree, what is Romish or savours of Rome. There is no saying how the movement may end." It is really lamentable to find those, upon other points sensible, lending countenance to a line of reasoning so puerile, so utterly absurd. It is well to have a wholesome dread of the insidious advances of Romanism. But it bespeaks a diseased and unmanly state of mind to be deterred from what is *scriptural* and *becoming*, by an undefined apprehension that by doing what is *right*, what is *wrong* may be furthered. Moreover, an obstinate standing

still, instead of strengthening the true, contributes to the advancement of the false. When the yearnings of Christian consciousness cannot be satisfied, a discontent is induced which may ultimately lead to a casting about in search of what ought to have been provided by the worshippers' mother Church. Nothing has so materially advanced the interests of that least Protestant of all avowedly Protestant churches—the Scottish Episcopal—than the baldness, the undevoutness too often characteristic of our service. It is thus that the Duke of Argyll accounts for so many of the “families of Scotland having left the communion of Presbytery and joined that of the English Church.” “Few,” he says, “have been induced to do so by any previous conversion to church principles. The deeper source of the extensive alienation which has taken place is to be found in the superior attractions of a more ritual worship.” I notice this merely to illustrate that, instead of its being, as described by the supposed objectors, it is often the other way—“the no-motion” system is in reality more productive of evil than that which, while duly conservative of what is, aims at a more complete modelling upon what was and what should be. And I do conceive that, by bringing our worship more abreast of the necessities of the individual Christian ; by rendering it more fully than it is a worship in which all who form the Christian priesthood can profitably take part ; by clothing it with that consistency which originally bound together its varied parts, and yet left each part entire ; much may be done to win back many who have strayed, and to prevent the straying of others from the Church of their fatherland. And all this may be effected without departing, in any respect, from the simplicity of Presbyterian service, and without giving the slightest impetus to any movement Romeward.

I have found others who, without adopting the extreme

view last noticed, demur to occupying a position which, in the event of carrying that proposed into effect, will, in a manner, separate them from other congregations. Their whole objection is, "it is not customary." Those who take the higher ground of its being illegal to do ought save observe, to even *minutiæ*, what is most frequently recognized, I have already answered. I am referring only to those who are unwilling to give up, even although they know it to be wrong, what they have long been accustomed to, and who make it almost a condition of their acquiescence in a proposal, that others go along with them. That reluctance carries with it its own condemnation ; and, in so far as their being alone is concerned, let me remark concerning standing at praise, which, in the view of many, is a most startling feature, that many congregations of Presbyterians adopt that posture. In England, and in Ireland, for the most part, Presbyterians stand. In our own country the practice has been, to some extent, embraced. In Edinburgh, it has been introduced ; in Glasgow, I understand, it is upon the point of being introduced. In Orkney, I am informed, that in many of the parish churches, it has been for some time, the mode followed. And this I know, that many throughout our land are only waiting to follow those who lead. Indeed, my conviction is, that within a very short time, what wears the aspect of novelty now, will have become familiar to all ; and that those who now hesitate and murmur will be the first to wonder that a doubt should ever have crossed their minds as to the becomingness of rendering the Sanctuary-service, what Presbyterian service may and can ever be, truthful, consistent, and Scriptural.

I have dwelt at greater length upon the topics suggested by the Sermon now published than I originally anticipated. My apology is zeal for the Lord's House. That He who is the

one object of all really Christian worship may graciously cause His blessing to rest upon what has been written with a view to His glory and to the good of His Church, is my earnest hope and prayer. And to Him, in all humility, I commend the cause which lies so near to my heart, beseeching Him, in His own good time, to further and prosper it.

