

Modes of Intercession, Ancient and Modern.

IN studying the liturgical forms which the pious practice of intercession has taken in public worship, one appears to feel the heart-beats of Christian people in bygone ages. Who can read without emotion the supplication in the epistle of St Clement that God would "ransom our prisoners, uplift the weak, encourage the faint-hearted" (LIX.), or the petition in the 'Didache' that "as this bread once scattered upon the hills and gathered together became one, so let thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth unto thy kingdom"? The 'Bedes on the Sundaye' of Wynkyn de Worde (1532) present a more vivid picture of the social and industrial interests of the later Middle Ages than any historian can draw. "Ye shall praye for all true tyllers that labour for our sustenance that tyll the erth. Also ye shall praye for all the graynes and fruytes that been sowen, sette or done in the erthe or shall be done, that God send such wederynge that they may grow, encrease and multiply to the helpe and profyte of all mankind. Also ye shall praye for all shypmen and marchaunts, where so ever that they ben on land or on water, that God kepe them from all perylles, and brynge them home in sauftte with theyr goodes, shyppes and marchandyses, to the helpe, comforte and profyte of this realm . . ." (Brightman's 'The English Rite,' pp. 1033-4).

There is a simplicity and a rounded completeness in the intercessions of the past that the Church in modern times seems to lack, and it is in the hope that a fresh examination of some ancient forms of intercession may suggest some means of improvement in our public intercessions that this paper is written.

APOSTOLIC AND SUB-APOSTOLIC AGE.

The prominence of intercession in early Christian worship was the natural consequence of the belief that the

priestly Church should imitate its Priestly Head in His great work of intercession. No doubt this conviction also caused the Eucharist to become in a special sense an intercessory service; "do this in remembrance of Me" would mean in remembrance of Him "who ever liveth to make intercession for us." The apostolic injunction in 1st Timothy, ii, that intercessions should be made "for all men, for kings and all that are in authority," seems to have been literally carried out in the days of St Clement of Rome (96 A.D.), who concludes his intercession with several petitions on behalf of Domitian's régime, "that in peace and gentleness they may administer with piety the power given to them by Thee."

It is a fair inference from the baffling notices in the 'Didache' (139 A.D.), that intercession was connected with the Eucharist, either directly or, as some hold, indirectly through the 'Agape' (IX-X.) Certainly this is beyond dispute ten years later, at least in Rome, for Justin Martyr ('Apol.' 1. 65) says that "common Prayers" are offered at the Eucharist "for ourselves and the newly baptised and for all men everywhere" (cf. 1. 67). These "common Prayers," as Justin styles them, were doubtless expressed in litany or responsorial form, otherwise it is difficult to see how they could be described as 'common' at all. The familiar description of Christian worship in the 'Apology' (1. 67) shows that these prayers occurred after the sermon and before the presentation of the elements—*i.e.*, as the introduction to the Eucharist proper. This is the very point at which litanies of intercession or responsorial forms are invariably found in the great Eastern liturgies of the fourth and fifth centuries.

EUCCHARISTIC INTERCESSION.

In the fully developed liturgies of the Eastern Church intercession takes three definite forms.

1. Litanies of an informal kind provide for a great variety of subjects, each petition being uttered by the Deacon and the response, 'Kyrie Eleison,' being said by the people. Probably no form of intercession is of such practical value as this; the mind of the worshipper is concentrated on one subject at a time; his co-operation is elicited by means of the response; the range of subject is practically unlimited, and there is a freedom of spon-

taneity in the devotion which is lacking both in the more formal litanies in the West and in the long continuous prayer of "the great Intercession."

2. A more solemn and stately expression of intercessory prayer is provided in the Eucharistic Anaphora, usually after the Consecration prayer, although sometimes preceding it. This is "the great Intercession," which is a single prayer covering a variety of subjects. The following extract from the liturgy of Chrysostom, as used in the Church of the Holy Wisdom in London, gives an idea of this type of prayer: "Remember, O Lord, the city in which we sojourn, and every city and land and the faithful who dwell therein. Remember, O Lord, those who travel by land or by water, the sick and the suffering, the prisoners and their salvation"; after a number of suffrages the prayer is crowned by the model of all intercession, the Lord's Prayer.

3. The individual personal element in intercession was provided by means of the diptychs, two-leaved tablets, from which were read the names of persons living and departed for whom the prayers of the faithful were desired. The diptychs were originally recited at the offertory, but later were used in connection with the great Intercession. In Rome, probably in the sixth century, the desire for brevity resulted in the omission of the litanies from the Ordinary and Canon of the Mass, though the older tradition of using a litany at the Eucharist survived on special occasions such as Ordination, the Dedication of Churches, &c. Further, the names in the diptychs became stereotyped and practically meaningless, while the great Intercession was broken up, prayer for the living being transferred to the beginning of the Canon and prayer for the dead retaining its original place after the Consecration. In this way public intercession was reduced almost to the vanishing point save for priests and members of religious orders.

' BIDDINGS.'

In the tenth and eleventh centuries a movement began for the revival of regular intercession among the laity, spreading from Germany and France to England where it took the form of 'Bidding the Bedes' (*i.e.*, announcing the prayers). During the later Middle Ages it became customary for the priest, after the reading of the Gospel,

to offer the people certain subjects for silent prayer and bid them then say "Pater Noster" at the end of each 'bidding' or series of 'biddings.' In course of time models of this type of intercession were given to the clergy, and gradually the 'biddings' assumed a more or less regular form, though happily the language remained simple and the subjects of prayer covered the natural and practical interests of the people. This type of prayer still survives in the so-called Bidding Prayer used on certain occasions in Cathedrals and University Churches in England. A good version of this will be found in the 'Scottish Prayer Book' of 1929.

NON-EUCHARISTIC INTERCESSIONS.

In the fourth century intercession occupied some part of the morning and evening services such as we find provided in the eighth book of the Apostolic Constitutions (380); biddings for the various classes of the people present are said by the Deacon, the Bishop concluding with a prayer and a blessing. Similar intercessions seem to have been used at the 'hour services' conducted by pilgrims in Jerusalem (380?) (see M'Clure and Feltoe, 'The Pilgrimage of Etheria,' 1919). In the daily mediæval services known as the canonical hours no special provision for intercession was made, but we should suppose that, if members of religious houses were accustomed to recite the Psalter vicariously for the salvation of the world, it would be easy for them to read the collects with intercessory intention. When these services were reduced to two in 1549, both Matins and Evensong ended at the third collect; the intercessory prayers for the King, the clergy and people, &c., were first prescribed in the 'Scottish Prayer Book' of 1637, and thence passed into the English 'Book of Common Prayer' in 1661. In the Middle Ages intercession outside the Mass was for the most part confined to the litany or rogation sung in procession on great festivals and other special occasions. Such litanies differed from the somewhat similar responsorial forms of the East in that the latter were biddings inviting the people to pray, whereas the former were direct supplications to God. The litany in the 'Book of Common Prayer' is derived from this mediæval litany of the West. But in the 'Scottish Prayer Book' of 1929 there will be found a new short litany of the Eastern type.

SOME PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS.

1. In the 'English Prayer-Book,' 1928, appears a new method of intercessory prayer, an adaptation of the mediæval 'capitella,' which consisted usually of a bidding, a versicle and a response introducing a prayer. Here is an example from the 'Scottish Prayer Book.'

"Let us pray for all universities, colleges, and schools.

V. The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom ;

R. And to depart from evil is understanding.

Almighty God, of whose only gift cometh wisdom and understanding : We beseech thee with thy gracious favour to behold our universities, colleges, and schools, that the confines of knowledge may be enlarged, and all good learning flourish and abound ; bless all who teach and all who learn ; and grant that both teachers and learners in humility of heart may look ever upward unto thee, who art the fountain of all wisdom ; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee in the unity of the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.—AMEN."

It will be seen that the bidding introduces the subject of the intercession, while the *V.* and *R.* (invariably Scripture) furnish the mind with the spiritual disposition required by the prayer which follows. There can be no doubt as to the value of this type of intercession from the psychological point of view.

It is quite possible to use substantially this form of intercession at informal prayer meetings without any printed form. Let us suppose that the conductor at the outset begins, "Let us pray for the Divine blessing on the work of the Church for the extension of Christ's kingdom overseas." He then recites an appropriate verse of Scripture, "Jesus said, Go ye into all the world and make disciples of all the nations." After a brief pause for silent intercession he prays audibly for the illumination of non-Christians and for those who preach to them. He then announces : "Let us invoke the Divine blessing on the infant churches in —, especially on catechumens and the newly baptised," once more prefacing the brief silence

with a Scriptural verse such as "By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body whether we be Jews or Gentiles, and have all been made to drink into one Spirit"; the prayer that follows will then express the aspirations of prepared hearts and minds. The conductor may proceed to a third or fourth announcement in the same way, and the whole devotion might conclude with a general missionary prayer, preceded by the ejaculation, "Thy Kingdom come."

2. Even in congregations which dislike printed forms of prayer of any kind, it has been found quite possible to secure the attention and co-operation of people in intercessory biddings. The conductor announces at the beginning the general subject of intercession, and invites the people to join in a simple response such as, "Grant this, we beseech thee, O Lord," or a versicle and response; *V.* "O Lord, hear our prayer"; *R.* "And let our cry come into thee." Care should be taken to link the biddings in some kind of order, so that the minds of the people can pass naturally from one theme to another. The conductor will do well to vary the formula in introducing each bidding; the constant use of the phrase "let us pray for . . ." becomes irritating.

At Prayer Meetings of the Student Christian Movement this mode of conducting intercessions meets with no objection and is found most helpful.

3. No doubt the type of free intercessory prayer based on "the Great Intercession" of the Eucharist will, for long, remain the usual and perhaps the only possible mode of intercession in many congregations, though in practice it may become as stereotyped as any written form can be. With regard to this I would venture to deprecate the attempt to cast any section of such a prayer into the form of a collect, for the result too frequently is a series of crude collects and a break up of the sequence of the whole prayer. I would also plead for greater simplicity and dignity of language, and for the avoidance of *clichés* such as "our beloved land," "the Royal House," and the like. Variety can be secured even in the use of this form of prayer by spreading over four or five Sundays subjects which are often vaguely and allusively covered on one.

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