

Amen as the ratification of prayer. Why should not this be uttered with outpoken heartiness? As it is we hear the occasional response; and it is too often uttered as though the worshipper were ashamed of it; so that for the fervent assent we have only a satisfied groan. Why should not the worshippers set their seal on the prayer, vocally if not vociferously, and the earnest united Amen be their deliberate signature to their pastor's prayer?

Then, once again, might it not be well to have some more definite and regular arrangement than at present, for the reading of the Scriptures? Is there any reason why one passage at least to be read in the public service should not be pre-arranged and known as the lesson for the day? In many a family then, as well as in private retirement, the chapter might be read by members of the congregation beforehand, and all be prepared the better to profit by the word as publicly read, and, it may be, briefly expounded by the minister. We would not indeed insist upon this special plan. But it is certain that our irregular reading of Scripture with its frequent repetition of certain parts and the consequent disproportioned stress upon them would be well replaced by something more orderly and complete. We want to bring the Scriptures as a whole before the people, and this can never be done without more earnest care than often is at present exercised.

A word may also here be added with respect to public praise. Here the absolute essential is that the congregation at large should join. If vicariousness in the pulpit is bad, vicariousness in the choir is worse. Yet there is a manifest tendency, not avowedly, perhaps, but really, to delegate this most important and delightful part of Christian service to a select company. We have lately been told in the public papers that a Non-conformist minister, name and place not given, has put his choir into white surplices; this is probably an invention or a caricature; yet it would be only an extreme illustration of a spirit not unknown among us. A kind of revival of Christian psalmody has reached almost all our churches; and connected with that revival has been the introduction of many strains to which the congregation cannot choose but listen, being absolutely unable to join. Occasionally even the choir will perform an anthem. Now, what can be the meaning of this? Is it exhortation? The assembly cannot often hear the words, much less profit by them. Is it worship? Who then are the worshippers? Suppose, by some flight of imagination or stretch of charity, that the choir are all devotional as they sing, what is the attitude of the congregation? Have they delegated the joyful work of praise to their representatives in the gallery? It is impossible. The thing is a musical exercise, a display, the transplantation of the concert-room into the house of God. All that is true and spiritual in our worship utterly forbids it. Whatever the chosen music of our praise may be, it is for the whole assembly. And then the question arises, how are the congregation to be stimulated, encouraged, assisted to unite in the sacred exercise? Assuredly, we answer, if by a choir, this should be a company chosen from themselves; members of the congregation, to whom God has given His glorious gift of music, and who accordingly delight to exercise it for their companions' service and help. A professional choir has no business in our places of worship. Introduce it, and no wonder that throughout the assembly voices are silent which we hear with delight in the home circle. It is not felt to be their work to praise. But if felt to be the work of all, there will be no lack of harmony both of heart and voice. Something undoubtedly depends upon those who select, yet more on those who prepare our congregational tunes. In touching on a subject like this, diffidence is becoming; still, is it not a fact that the whole question is as yet unsettled? We have not even yet any congregational psalmody which worthily expresses our praise. "Cranbrook" and "Calcutta" are abandoned; but where are their substitutes? "Church music," as it is technically called, is not a true reflection of the spirit of our people. The store of national Christian melodies is small. We have ill replaced the tunes wont to stir our youthful hearts by movement from masses or fragments from oratorios. Once our singing was congregational, but not classical; now it is classical, but too often not congregational. Can we combine the two? Much has been done in our own times to answer this question; and among all labourers for the good of the churches, none perhaps are more useful than those who have taken it as their vocation, not to instruct choirs so much as to arouse congregations, urging them to take their part in public praise, and pointing out to them the way, so that all may sing with the spirit and with the understanding also.

VI.

Another note of our public worship is liberality. If our religious freedom is a reality, it must assert itself in the order and conduct of our devotion. Of small avail would it be to be free from the yoke of a liturgy, if we are to be bound by the usages of a denomination. Why should not every pastor or assembly select the form which may seem most expressive or edifying, without unkindly criticism or reproach? For example, one congregation prefers to enter literally into the courts of Jehovah with thanksgiving and into His gates with praise; another thinks it most befitting to begin the service with an act of humiliation and profession of sin, that the claims of God's law may be acknowledged, and forgiveness for its violation sought, before the worshippers can claim the right to be joyful in their Father. Once more, some find the "long prayer," as it is frequently and appropriately called, a weariness to the flesh; and substitute for it two or even three distinct acts of devotion. Others again can most uninterruptedly worship when the stream of petition and

intercession is unbroken. Why should not either plan be adopted? A stranger minister again is perplexed by the programme which he finds in the pulpit: why should not he conduct the service in his own way? Is it essential even that the same order should always be observed in the same place by the stated pastor? Or again, in public psalmody, some congregations employ the organ to aid their work of praise, and find the result to be an increase in the fitness, the precision, and the congregational character of their singing. Others prefer the concord of harmonious voices unaided by instrumental accompaniment. In many places the characteristic psalmody of our worship is varied by the introduction of chanting. The holiest words in the world are adapted in their grand biblical simplicity as the material of praise, and the music is thought to be as near as we can approach to the strains in which Christ and His disciples sang their hymn before they went out to the Mount of Olives. But in other churches chanting is an abomination; David must be turned into rhyme before we can conscientiously sing him; or if the chant is ever admitted, it must only be for Short and Common metre, on no account for the Bible Psalms or the *Te Deum*. Now, these all seem matters for friendly discussion; these are surely not questions of conscience, much less matters for disunion or strife. We can afford to be free. Organ questions, or questions of chanting, have no place in the discussions of our associations or union. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. The danger is that a combative individualism should assert itself, the calm verdict of the church be disregarded by dissentients, and excellent brethren fall into the error of mistaking their aesthetic principles for the dictates of conscience, and act as though aggrieved by deadly error, when they are only distressed because the tastes of others differ from their own.

VII.

Our worship, once more, should be in the true sense catholic.

The Christian assembly meets before God, not in its own behalf alone, but in some sort as representative of the world. Amid the thoughts suggested by every worshipper's own desires or sorrows or cares, perforce arise those which, with larger sweep and more expansive sympathy, pertain to all humanity. Thus we enter into the spirit of His command who taught us first to pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven."

One of the greatest faults in our devotions is their undue restriction. Sometimes, indeed, it has been argued that a prayer should deal with one topic only, or one class of topics, such for instance as that of which the sermon is intended to treat, and to which the hymns also relate. No doubt the whole service will then be more homogeneous; but such restriction would seem to set aside one purpose at least of public prayer. We want to take with us into the sanctuary the thoughts, emotions, anxieties, that crowd the minds of men; not indeed to drag our devotion down to the level of such cares but to give us fresh errands to the throne of grace.

Worshippers sometimes feel a want in this respect. They go from the busy world and find no echo to their most engrossing thoughts, no voice given to their heaviest cares before the mercy seat. In how many services during the year now past should we have listened in vain for any devotional allusion to such matters of public interest as the late continental war, the prospects of the Papacy, and of the free churches of Christendom as affected thereby; or to come nearer home, of the cattle plague, the financial crisis, the long summer rains with the results, injury and loss to the harvest. Again, in how many of our sanctuaries is prayer for the Queen, for our rulers and especially for the Parliament, habitually neglected! The true perspective of our devotion is narrowed, and self and home, instead of being but the foreground, occupy the whole extent of vision. Nay, the missionary cause itself is too frequently forgotten, or presented before God in vague and general allusions which can scarcely detain the minds of any worshipper.

Now, in all this there seems a failure to apprehend the true purpose and scope of public prayer. We would not, indeed, pass off into generalities, neglecting the church at home for the church universal, or, in formal prayers for princes and senators pass over the needs of the assembly when present before God. But this would not be necessary. It is often felt to be a happy thing that we can present the topic of social need, or of a national desire, in our application before God without waiting for a royal mandate or an archbishop's form. Let us use our freedom well, and so teach our congregations that all human life has its needs to be expressed in prayer, and that the worshipping church can enter with the liveliest sympathy, in the moments of its deepest devoutness, into every secular and temporal as well as spiritual and eternal interest of men.

In praise, too, the same catholicity should be sought. Special gratitude for individual mercies received, should be devoutly uttered in the public prayer; though even here there are habits among us which tend to formalism, and that might advantageously be abolished or modified. But without a general thanksgiving no Christian service can be complete. The altar must always have its incense; and not our own mercies only, but all the world's precious things should blend in its preparation, and add to the exquisiteness of its fragrance. Thus we shall be prepared to mount one step higher still, and pass from thankfulness to praise. For the two things are distinct. We do not confine our words or tokens of affection to the acknowledgement of favours received. No; love is most precious when unpurchased; a tribute to the beauty or the loveliness of character, whether we receive its direct benefit or not. So will it be in our loftiest, pur-

est thoughts of God. We love Him, we thank Him for what He has done for us—and then, passing on to the contemplation of His infinite excellence, we adore Him for what He is. Self is forgotten in the light of His glory. And thus while it is written, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits," the inspiration of a holier joy even than the joy of such remembrance was already in the worshipper's mind: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name."

Correspondence.

For the Christian Messenger.

November 22, 1866.

United States Correspondence.

Dear Messenger,—

Have not forgotten my promise to pen a few lines concerning affairs in this state (Maine). Your readers are already aware of our great victory in behalf of Republican principles, so it is not necessary for me to enter into that subject. We are now enjoying beautiful and mild weather for this time of the year. Farmers are very busy in making preparations for the famous Jack Frost—they are banking up their houses to prevent his entrance, and laying in a stock of wood to give him a warm reception when he does come. All that I can say of the religious affairs is that some of the churches can sing.

Lo, the promise of a shower  
Drops already from above.

Some are looking for the shower, and many are expecting a realization of their desires. I have just returned from the meetings of the Maine Baptist Ministers' Institute, held in Waterville. Though I went with some fears and prejudice in my mind as to their real utility—fearing the meetings would foster the spirit of carping criticism, I can truly say that more pleasant and instructive meetings I have never attended. This Institute partially formed last year, and held two or three sessions, was not properly constituted till its meetings this year, when about 50 ministers signed the constitution. They appointed a President, a Secretary, Treasurer, and three Directors. Its object is to promote the intellectual and spiritual benefit of its members. It had its origin in a desire on the part of many of the ministry for an opportunity to obtain instruction, and to hold discussions upon the various topics of a doctrinal and practical character which are specially interesting to ministers of the Gospel. On Tuesday evening the 12th I made one of a number of ministers and others listening to a lecture by Rev. Dr. Conant, (formerly, from 1827 to 1833, a professor in Waterville College,) who is now connected with the Bible Union, and well known for his excellent translation of the book of Job. From Wednesday to the Sabbath we had lectures by Rev. Dr. Conant, on the Ancient Manuscripts of Scripture and remarkable circumstances of their preservation; of the most important editions of the original text published after the introduction of the various translations into the English tongue; also lectures by Rev. Dr. Hovey of Newton Theological School, on the Divine Authority of the Bible—Extent of Inspiration—Native Depravity—Extent of the Atonement—The Conscious Existence of Departed Souls in the Intermediate State—The Resurrection—Baptism—and the Position of Christian Women in the Worship of God, having particular reference to their praying and speaking in meeting. The lectures occupied a little more than an hour in their delivery, then an hour was spent in discussing questions arising out of the lecture, (the questions being submitted in writing.)

On the Sabbath, Rev. L. D. Hill of Bath, preached an excellent and telling sermon on Christ crucified. Dr. Stockbridge of Portland, on Mat. xvi. 17. Evening Dr. Conant gave a popular lecture on the Mosaic accounts of the Creation. Between morning and afternoon service, and on Monday morning Dr. Conant gave us Exegetical Exercises on John x. 1-19, and Genesis iv. 1-16. On Monday afternoon we had discussions on the following subjects—Sawtells work in favor of Open Communion—The best Method of raising money for the cause of Christ—Incidents in Revivals, giving hints as to the best way to promote revivals—How can Ministers best help each other. At the close we all knelt in prayer for the church with which we met—the College of the place—our fields of labour, and a renewal of our dedication to God. This meeting was a very solemn one, and deepened our feelings of attachment to the cause of Christ. One marked feature during our sessions was our morning prayer meetings of an hour's length, in which we enjoyed much of the pro-

sence of the Divine Master. I need not say that the lectures were able and instructive, we had things both new and old brought before us. It was really delightful to see the Christian love manifested, and the absence of every thing that would wound the feelings of any. Now about the expenses! A request was made in the *Zion's Advocate*, (Our Baptist paper of the State,) to the churches that they make a collection for their ministers' expenses and the Institute, and give their minister a Sabbath, which was carried out by many churches, and when we reached Waterville we were made welcome by the members of the Baptist Church, and were entertained for several days without expense. We paid only one way by the railway and so had more money for the Institute. I have been particular in details because the brethren in Nova Scotia might have some idea of trying to get up one. Why not? Do they not need it? If it only brings them together for prayer for each other, something would be gained. More in my next.

A MINISTER.

For the Christian Messenger.

Psalmody and Praise.

No. 3.

During a lengthened professional career, I have made the vocal branch of the musical art my earnest study, and have observed the various influences advancing, and those retarding its progress, in various circumstances of domestic and social, town and country life; and propose to shew some of the most prominent causes developed, for the information of the readers of the *Messenger*.

Having shown the demoralizing influences of one of the social vices which retard its progress, I shall consider, first, the necessity of having a choir; second, its character; third, its influence; fourth, the psalmody, and its application; and fifthly, the influences which assist or injure its usefulness.

Praise is the Christian's blessed privilege. It is the chief enjoyment of the ransomed in heaven. Robbed of this soul-elevating exercise, our sanctuary privileges lose one half their sweets, and our inner life one half of its source of blessedness. All Christians should be praising Christians, if they would be fervent Christians; for an ungrateful, thankless heart is unchristian. Scripture enjoins "Let all the people praise the Lord!" so the office of praise is not delegated to the young alone, nor are the members of the congregation to praise by proxy, and silently leave it to the choir. Real, honest, fervent Christians could only recognise in so doing an entire subversion of this divinely instituted appointment,—a daring device of Satan upon the "inner life" of the church, and an innovation intolerable to be borne, upon Christian privilege. Of what moment are spiritual blessings which only some Christians are privileged to enjoy? Yet a choir is a necessity; and the more practically efficient that choir becomes, for the purpose of praise, and the assistance of general praise, the more "decently and in order" are all things relative to this important duty discharged.

Voices are generally of six distinct classes. A tune which is well adapted to the use of the best voices, is often a poor vehicle of praise for the inferior ones. Female voices, are commonly of two classes,—Alto and Treble; a tune which the better class of Treble voices might sing with ease would be too high for the compass and register of the Alto voices; and, while the trained voices of a choir might perform it effectively, others would find out their inefficiency, and would probably remain silent. Of male voices, including those of boys, there are commonly four varieties:—Contralto, Tenor, Baritone and Bass. The first and the two latter would experience similar inconvenience with the lower variety of female voices in singing the tunes referred to, and thus a large portion of the congregation would be debarred from the privilege of praise. Then again, voices called "Treble" are of two varieties—high and low, or first and second Treble; and the same of the Baritones, Tenor and Bass. Tunes are often chosen which the lower varieties of these are unable wholly to sing, and they are debarred from participating fully in this part of worship. The chorister has to consider this physical adaptation, and select tunes as suitable for all, as the collection in use will permit.

This variety of vocal power induces complication and disagreeable consequences, when the parties are anxious to share the pleasure of the performance, thus there is a necessity of having parts in the same tune, suitable for each variety of voice. This urgently demands a choir. In the choir we have the remedy, if properly organized,