

THE  
Union Seminary Magazine.

---

Vol. XII.

DECEMBER, 1900—JANUARY, 1901.

No. 2.

---

I. Literary.

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY.

BY REV. PEYTON H. HOGE, D. D.

I.

Where Egypt's sacred river creeps  
Along its plenteous plains;  
Where rise its monumental heaps  
And colonnaded fanes;  
Where History, Art and Science scored  
In sculptured wall their record old,  
And in a myriad tombs were stored  
Treasures of knowledge yet untold;  
Where Power has reached its loftiest state  
And millions cringed before the great;  
A people known to God  
The path of sorrow trod,  
And in hard bondage wrought, and mourned their bitter fate.

II.

The silent stars look down—  
Look down and give no sign;  
Dumb is the oracle of On,  
Dumb is Osiris' shrine;  
And Memnon's sunrise song  
To them no answer brings;  
In vain for them his notes prolong,  
In vain for them he sings;

## A PLEA FOR PREPARATION FOR PUBLIC PRAYER.

BY REV. R. P. KERR, D. D.

On no other subject are the non liturgical churches so much criticised as on our public prayers. Our prayers are compared, to their disadvantage, with those of the Episcopal Prayer-book, which, gathered from many sources, Presbyterian among others, are, in the main, models of this kind of literature. There are certain disadvantages connected with the reading every Sabbath of the same set forms, and, though not always, it is often the case that they are repeated mechanically and with little feeling. One of the objections to the Episcopal form is that it is too long, and does not allow sufficient time for the sermon. But when these prayers are rendered in a tone and with an unction suited to their majestic character, they are often most impressive and furnish an admirable vehicle for the devotions of the people. The unavoidable danger is of their becoming trite from being often repeated. Now this article is not a plea for printed prayers, nor for a liturgy, but for such public prayers as may not be compared unfavorably with those of the Episcopal Prayer-book. It is not to be expected that the average non-liturgical prayer shall, in classic style, be equal to these, but they should be of such a high order and so free from objectionable elements as not to offend good taste. Indeed, there need be no hesitation in saying that a simple, direct, scriptural, earnest, extempore prayer, coming from a heart aflame with love to God and man, is the best possible leading for the devotions of the people.

A few men are "gifted in prayer," but they are few, and it is doubtful if any man is "gifted" enough to lead acceptably the prayers of a congregation in four or six prayers on every Sabbath without preparation for this exalted service. How much preparation for public prayer is made by most ministers is a question. Probably very little by most, and by many none.

The average prayer in our pulpits is not satisfactory, and it is because of lack of preparation for public prayer. We often hear Scripture expounded in what professes to be an address to God,

and events of the day mentioned, while awkward sentences are uttered and many things said that the preacher himself would not tolerate in his sermon. It is undoubtedly more difficult to pray acceptably than to preach acceptably, yet how little preparation is made for this part of the office of the minister.

If the average prayer at the regular services may be called unsatisfactory, prayers at funerals and marriages, especially funerals, are worse. It is the exception to hear a proper prayer at a funeral. The writer remembers a very eminent Presbyterian minister who always introduced in his funeral prayers the clod, the coffin, the spade, and the gnawing, crawling worm. Surely a funeral is the last place at which to speak of these harsh accompaniments of death. The hearts of the bereaved are sore enough already without the mention of what must make their anguish more poignant still. It is bad taste, and makes some people say, "Well, we ought to have a prayer-book." No, I do not say that we ought to have a prayer-book, but that we ought to prepare for public prayer, and that our prayers should be chaste and refined. Coarseness of speech is nowhere so coarse as in prayer.

One reason prayer is so difficult a thing, and one argument for preparation beforehand, is that we have to pray for the same things every Sabbath and very much the same things at every service. The wants of the people whom we lead are, with some necessary variations, usually the same. The great needs are perennial, and we ought in our prayers to express the needs of the people. Their burdens, anxieties, wants should all find utterance in the pulpit prayer, and, as far as possible, at each service. How difficult it is to pray for the same things a hundred times, yes, two hundred times, a year, and do it well! In preaching, we have the whole circle of doctrine, the whole vast variety of Scripture and human experience to choose from. We are not expected to preach it all every Sabbath. But in public prayer we are expected to include every Sabbath all the needs of the people. It is simply impossible to do it without preparation.

Look for a moment at the great number of subjects that must be covered, or at least touched, in a public service: Adoration, thanksgiving, confession, supplication, intercession for the sick, the poor, the aged, the young, the bereaved, the tempted, fallen, strangers, the different departments of the work of the congre-

gation, the office bearers, the ministry, the whole church of God, missions, the nations, our country and its rulers. Can any mortal man voice the needs of all these, and more that are not mentioned here, and do it acceptably, without preparation?

Another thing. We are speaking to God. We have no more right to offer God a slovenly prayer than to preach a slovenly sermon to the people. A man will sometimes spend a week preparing to speak to the people, and not five minutes for speaking to God for the people. It may be argued that the Holy Spirit will give us utterance. Of course, if we use the sense and time he has given us. If not, we can no more expect his help than we could in preaching a half prepared sermon.

We ought to study models of prayer. Christ said of the model he gave, "After this *manner* therefore pray ye." He gave it as a model. Let us model our prayers after that matchless standard, and let us compare other prayers that have been written by that model, and, observe, it is brief. There are many books of prayers which it would be well for us to study. The Euchologion of the Church of Scotland, the Liturgies of the Reformed Churches, books of prayers that have been published by eminent men. I do not urge that these be memorized and repeated in the pulpit, but that we study them, and cultivate a proper style for prayer.

Perhaps the most helpful thing to do is to practice writing prayers. Write often, every week if possible, a series of prayers for a Sabbath service. Divide up the various topics between the several prayers, and carefully write them out. Read them over, correct them, improve them. Avoid sameness, set phrases, repetition, the commonplace. Use scriptural phrases, simple Anglo-Saxon words. Avoid illustrations and figures of speech. The preparation for public prayer should be similar to that for preaching. After years of experience, and various experiments, I am convinced that the best method of preparation for preaching is to *write* every sermon, and *not memorize* it, but study it, memorizing the line of thought and most important sentences, definitions, propositions, etc., and then go into the pulpit, having mastered your subject, and being mastered by it, but free from the trammels of a *memoriter* style. If a minister will give an hour or two every Saturday to the preparation for public prayer, whatever his method of preparation, studying models and writing prayers, he will inevitably improve this part of his service.

One thing above all others, in this connection, he ought to seek God's help. The prayer of the disciples should be his: "Lord, teach us to pray"—teach me to lead thy people in their approach to thee.

The Rev. M. D. Hoge, D. D., whose whole pulpit work was of the highest character, was often said to be "gifted in prayer." He was "gifted," singularly gifted, in prayer, and probably no man of his generation could have made a better prayer without previous preparation, but I happen to know that he wrote prayers innumerable, that he studied models, and that he made as careful preparation for public prayer as he did for his sermons. He was "gifted," but he did not depend upon the inspiration of the moment; he did what every minister ought to do, he used the means God gave him; he improved his gifts by study and careful preparation. A few men of our day have attained the same degree of excellence and acceptability. We may well follow his great example.

The days of supernatural inspiration are past, and we are not to expect the Holy Spirit to put ideas into our heads, words into our mouths, and deep feeling in our hearts, unless we use the faculties, means and time that he has given us to fulfil the mission to which he has called us, both in preaching and prayer.

*Richmond, Va.*