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Posture in prayer.

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POSTURE IN PRAYER:

AN

ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE YOUNG MEN'S ASSOCIATION

OF

ST. PAUL'S CHURCH.

MacIntosh.

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Posture in Prayer.

WAYLAND, in his moral science, defines prayer to be :
“ The direct intercourse of the spirit of man with the
“ spiritual and unseen Creator.” “ God is a spirit and
“ those that worship him, must worship him in spirit and
“ in truth.”

The explicit declaration contained in the last sentence, that the worship must be in spirit and in truth, seems to preclude the possibility of the efficacy or utility of prayer being in any way affected by bodily attitudes. Speaking of the subject abstractedly, and considering the true character of prayer, namely, the outpouring of the heart of man to the Supreme Being, either in unbosoming cares that depress our spirits, or in making known our wants, or in expressing our thanks, it seems almost profane to take into consideration the comparative advantages of bodily position. Prayer is concerned with the *soul*—not with the body ; and those who are sticklers in matters of form, merely for the forms sake, without strong collateral recommendations in support of their opinions, may, on reflection, find themselves much in the position of the characters in the fable of the dog, the bone, and the shadow. That position should be chosen in which we can best pray. It may be as well at the outset to state that I am not a disciple, either directly or by implication, of such an unchristian tenet as that “ postures are conducive to truer devotion.” Such a pretension would, in ordinary circumstances, bear with it its own

death warrant ; but, when it receives countenance from those having authority, it may be not unprofitable to explain its fallacy. In the present instance the prevalence of false notions arising from mis-statements investing forms with unauthorized preference and sanctity, and the deleterious influences resulting therefrom, is my justification for writing on a subject that might be considered beyond my province, bordering closely on the confines of theology, and, in ordinary circumstances, of no interest to the general public.

In private prayer, it is plain that that position of the body will be chosen which a broken and a contrite spirit may suggest. If the suppliant have been taught in childhood to kneel, he will kneel intuitively. As a general rule it may be stated that in private prayer, kneeling is the more prevalent form, and numerous are the instances, both in the old and the new Testaments, in which this posture is spoken of in connection with individual devotion. It is not the corporal bowing down, however, that has weight with the Judger of hearts. Indeed it may be fairly questioned, whether or no the most sincere prayers, those conceptions of the soul most akin to Godship, are produced during the conventional prostration of the body in any form. The probability is, that such a disposition of mind and heart is incompatible with any thought for the body, but is produced by external operating causes, as in the presence of great calamities, at the bedside of a friend or relative about to shuffle off this "mortal coil," or, to return to a more congenial subject of contemplation, when the strains of music stir the soul to its depths in glowing admiration of that which is good, and true, and sacred.

However, in order that there should be uniformity in assemblies for public worship, it is expedient that certain forms should be adopted and practised, and at present throughout Christendom the rival postures for preference at prayer are standing and kneeling. "Even

“in external forms and ceremonies,” says the late Dr. MATHIESON,* “union is an object most desirable, an object to be kept constantly in view, and its attainment aimed at in the pure spirit of brotherly love.” From what has been already said and quoted, it may be inferred that neither form is entitled to any preferential claim on the merits generally. Thus if a number of persons were about to form a new sect, it might be a matter of indifference what posture was adopted and practised, though it is natural to expect that that form would be chosen which is supported by the greatest amount of scriptural authority. But the issue is somewhat different when we put in question the appropriateness of a form of long standing in a christian body. In this case, if the existing form be founded on scriptural authority and not absolutely inconvenient, it is justifiable and but reasonable to demand the grounds of exception to it, and the reasons for adopting another in preference. But more of this hereafter.

Meantime let us examine what postures in prayer are spoken of most frequently in scripture. We find that sometimes the suppliant stood, sometimes he knelt, and on other occasions, prostrated himself or cast his face upon the ground. No posture, however, is commanded in scripture. NEANDER tells us † that, “The christian fathers combatted a superstitious notion which attached great importance to certain bodily postures and certain outward ceremonies in prayer.” Moreover the same erudite writer seems to countenance the opinion that the words “kneeling,” “bowing,” “cast down,” &c., are sometimes, at least, used figuratively in scripture; thus, speaking of Philippians ii, 10: “At the name of Jesus every knee should bow,” &c., he says: “The apostle seems to refer to *the spiritual bowing of the knee*, since

* Sermon before Synod, 1861.

† Ryland's translation, London, 1852.

“ the heart throws itself down before God in the name of Jesus, and humbles itself in his presence.” Why should not the same interpretation be applied to Psalm xcvi. 6, and to Isaiah xlv. 23, where the bowing of the knee is spoken of in almost precisely the same words? Moreover, prostration, or casting one’s face upon the ground, should not be confounded with kneeling, and few would now choose it as a form of worship in the modern christian church. Those who desire to look into what scriptural usage was, may be saved considerable research by referring to a table appended to this pamphlet, which comprises a number of texts in which standing and kneeling are referred to in the Bible.*

Upon the whole it will probably be admitted by any candid investigator, that, while both forms are recognised by scripture, there is a decided preponderance of scriptural usage in favor of standing at prayer. This might be demonstrated by a comparison of texts. It is also worthy of notice that in nearly every instance in which kneeling is referred to as the devotional attitude, it is connected with individual or private prayer. The Jews invariably stood at prayer in their synagogues, and it must not be forgotten that the model of the christian service is that of the synagogue, and not that of the temple. The two most remarkable prayers in the old testament, namely, that of Solomon at the dedication of the temple (2 Chron. v. 3,) and that of Ezra after the captivity, (Nehemiah vii) at both of which the people stood, and several other passages, show conclusively what the custom was among the Jewish congregations, whereas the words of our Saviour to his disciples in commending christian charity, (Mark xi, v. 25): “ When ye *stand praying*, forgive,” &c., seem to recognise the ancient practice. It is true that at the dedication of the

* Those who desire to extend their researches, may consult with advantage “ Cruden’s Concordance,” than which it were difficult to find a more perfect monument of literary industry.

temple, Solomon knelt before the altar, and other instances are to be found in which the priest acted similarly. When however the priest turned towards the congregation, both he and the people were accustomed to stand at prayer, and the few instances in which kneeling is spoken of in public worship rather show what the exception was, than that it ever was the recognised attitude of devotion by the ancient Jewish or early christian congregations. Moreover we are informed by NEANDER, that in the early christian church ; “ On Sunday, instead “ of kneeling, an upright posture was adopted as more “ expressive of the joyful feeling that Christ had raised “ fallen man to heaven.” This opinion is supported by EUSEBIUS and JUSTYN MARTYR, who tell us that on the Lord’s day, and during the feast from Easter to Whit-Sunday, the people stood at prayer, the better to commemorate with joyful thanksgiving Christ’s resurrection and our spiritual resurrection through Him. In contradistinction we are informed* that there existed in the early christian church a class called Penitents, composed of persons who were cut off from the privileges of church fellowship for apostacy, or some breach of the moral code established. They were only re-admitted into the church after a course of humiliatory exercises. Touching the nature of these humiliatory exercises, RIDDLE, in his “ Christian Antiquities,” † tells us that the first three classes of Penitents were *forbidden to stand during prayers ; they were obliged to kneel.*

Among barbarous nations, however, from early times, kneeling, whether induced by fear or reverence, has been the most prevalent posture of prayer to the gods, and it is probable that the practice crept into the christian church, and was tolerated by the friends of christianity, inasmuch as this posture was then indigenous among

* Denominational Reason Why, page 12.

† pp. 589—600.

the Gentile nations, and as the disciples looked more to displacing false doctrine than to interfering with established forms. Kneeling at prayer thus became engrafted to a large extent on the early christian church, not by evangelical teaching, but by prescription and custom. However, it may be proper to mention that kneeling never wholly superseded standing in the christian church as a posture of prayer, nor has it done so in the present Roman Catholic Church. Indeed it is a circumstance worthy of note, that at the celebration of the ordinary, or low mass, the congregation *kneel* at prayers, whereas at the corresponding prayers in the high, or the pontifical masses, the congregation *stand*. Thus in the high, or pontifical masses, the people *stand* at the prayer commencing "Gloria in excelsis Deo," (Glory to God in the highest,) and at the "Credo," or Creed; they also *stand* at the "Pater Noster," or Lord's Prayer, and at that part of the preface commencing "Vere dignum et justum est æquum et salutare nos tibi auferimus." Such is the practice of the Roman Catholic Church in our own days.

Now at the time of the Reformation some churches left the papacy, but still retained a number of its peculiar forms. Such was the Episcopal Church of England which inherits the custom of kneeling at prayer from the Roman Catholic Church and transmits it to the bodies dissenting from itself, as to the Methodists and others.

In certain other churches, however, the protest against the papacy was more complete, comprising a radical change not merely in doctrine, but in forms of church worship. Such were the Swiss or Calvinistic Church at Geneva, the German Reformed Church, and the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. These denominations dissented not merely against matters of doctrine in the then existing Roman Catholic Church, but against the forms and ceremonies also, and their first and

most decided step was to declare the Scriptures of the Old and the New Testaments their only rule of faith. From this sacred source also they proceeded to extract a form of worship, adhering as closely as possible to the simple *formula* of the primitive church. Finding a predominance of scriptural authority, as they thought, in favour of standing at prayer in public assemblies; finding that this was the invariable form existing among the Jews; nay, finding, that it received Christ's sacred recognition,* it is not unnatural that the early Calvinistic and Presbyterian reformers should have made choice of the standing posture. The other forms of the Church then selected, though ample, were few and simple, and quite in accord with the symmetry of the new worship, which was, and still is typical, in its freedom from superfluity, of the straight forwardness of Scottish character. "During the singing the Congregation sit, and stand while the prayers are being offered. *This has been the custom in the Church of Scotland from the first,*"† and Dr. ROBERT JAMIESON confirms the early practice in the following words, "The people all rise at the prayer, which is offered by *the Minister, standing also* in front of the congregation..... *The public prayers are always without the shackles of prescribed forms.*"

The Presbyterian Church is rather characterised by an absence of form. Worship of a Supreme Being was the predominant feature that the early Presbyters sought to stamp on the new worship, and the simplest possible forms were adopted in order that the people should place no stress on these things, but rather on that which must ever continue the soul of the Presbyterian service, the heartfelt, earnest, truthful utterances of Christ's deputy in the pulpit, and the willing, fervent responses of the heart thereto. And by this means, "The sword of

* Mark xi. 25.—"When ye stand praying forgive if ye have aught against any, &c."

† The Religions of the World, page 127.

the Spirit," the Church of Scotland has held since its foundation, and must now, and for all time, "hold her "right place in the affections of the people generally, and "of the rising generation particularly," and not by any sentimental efforts at adapting her time honored all-sufficient forms of worship to "the tastes of an age of rapidly growing culture and refinement"!

Now apart from the Scriptural sanction which standing at prayer in public assemblies receives—apart from the prevalency of this posture in many reformed churches, and to some extent even in the Roman Catholic Church, it has another claim to continuance peculiar to those christian bodies that adopted it from their incipency. For once that standing became the established attitude of public prayer in our Church, its perpetuity therein is fixed, provided its claims to adherence are equal to those of any other rival posture.

Dr. WHATELY is celebrated as a writer on Logic and Rhetoric; he is considered a fair authority in matters of reasoning. He says, *

"There is a presumption in favor of every existing "institution. Many of these (we will suppose the "majority,) may be susceptible of alteration for the "better, but still, *the burden of proof lies with him who "proposes an alteration*, simply on the ground that because "a change is not a good in itself, he who demands a "change, must *show cause* for it. No one is called on " (though he may find it advisable) to defend an existing "institution till some argument is adduced against it: "and that argument ought in fairness to prove not "merely an actual inconvenience, but the possibility of "a change for the better." †

Standing having been from the time of the final establishment of the Presbyterian form of worship in

* Rhetoric p. 91.

† Stet presumptio donec probetur in contrario.

Scotland, the undeviating attitude of prayer in the Kirk, there is, apart from its other claims to preference, a presumption in favour of its orthodoxy. Long continued custom has animated in law. He who would displace it, must show that the existing form is not only actually inconvenient, but that there is a "possibility of a change for the better," and must use none but legitimate means in effecting the change. The burden of proof lies with him who proposes the alteration. Now let us see what the "argument against" the existing posture, is and to what extent the advocates of the proposed one "show cause" for the change. It is but reasonable to expect that they, being technically speaking the Plaintiffs, have some proof to bring forward in support of their opinions. "Proof devolves upon him who declares, not upon him who denies,"* is a maxim of many centuries standing—and speaking of the nature of proof, Sir WILLIAM HAMILTON, the logician, no mean authority, says † that in matters of reasoning, "nothing is to be begged, borrowed or stolen."

Now, to our astonishment, the adherents of the kneeling posture do not pretend that there is any inconvenience in standing at prayer, and their pretension in consequence loses one element of strength; neither do they pretend that a change from standing to kneeling at prayer is a question of importance; on the contrary it is admitted directly and inferentially that it is comparatively "trifling." Therefore as regards the Presbyterian Church the pretensions of the advocates of the kneeling posture fall to the ground, and the standing posture is entitled to a verdict without entering upon a defence.

This is considering the question as regards the Presbyterian Church, but it must be remembered that in Churches, in which kneeling at public worship is the

* *Ei incumbit probatio, qui dicit non qui negat.*—*The Digest.*

† *Logic* p. 371.

more prevalent posture, and has been established therein for a considerable time, as in the Roman Catholic and Episcopal Churches, the presumption is, in these cases, in favour of kneeling, as being the existing form, and the burden of proof of the superiority, or convenience of any other form would devolve upon those desiring its adoption.

Now it would appear that, on the merits of standing and kneeling in public worship there is a predominance of scriptural usage in favor of standing: it is moreover true that as regards the Presbyterian Church in particular, the standing posture has by long established custom animated in law as effectually as if it had been established by a special act of the Assembly. If I am correct in these two grounds, they are sufficient to decide this question in favour of the standing posture.

But perhaps there are some for whom this reasoning is not sufficient. There is in most communities an unenviable class of persons, who renounce reason altogether in matters even remotely appertaining to theology. They follow what they call, by a misnomer, their own conviction. Ask them for a reason—and they set up that invulnerable defence—"Zeal for the Lord." We have all heard these words before, "Zeal for the Lord"—until they have become a familiar unmeaning phrase. They have an ambiguous history, and are never to be taken on credit. The genuine article presumed by these words has been remarkably rare in all ages—even now, there are very many counterfeits of the original "Zeal for the Lord." With this same warrant have not Papists burnt heretics? With this same warrant have not Protestants butchered Papists? And, with this same warrant, do not many even in our days seek exemption from the amenities of reasoning men? Behind this Chinese wall they find a lurking place: "As if," to quote the words of Froude the Historian; "As if it were

“beyond all doubt they were on God’s side—as if serious inquiry after truth was something which they were entitled to resent. They treat intellectual difficulties as if they deserved rather to be condemned and punished than considered and weighed, and rather stop their ears and run with one accord upon any one who disagrees with them than listen patiently to what he has to say.” “Do what we will, reason must be our ultimate authority,” and he who renounces it has been by the same author not inaptly compared to, “a man sitting on the end of a plank and deliberately sawing off his seat.”

But I am aware that certain excuses—for I cannot demean the word reason by using it in this connection—I am aware that certain excuses are put forward *in forma pauperis*, with a view to begging a preferential claim for kneeling; it will however be seen, on examination, that this unwarranted demand for charity is a fraud.

It is now-a-days asserted, that there is a defection from the Presbyterian Church, by reason of the dissatisfaction felt by the present generation with the “severely simple service” that sufficed for our fathers. This is a gratuitous assertion wholly unsupported by proof, and to meet it by a counter assertion, I may say that I never knew a genuine Presbyterian family to leave our Church for this cause. Granting, however, for the sake of argument, that there is a defection from Presbyterianism, are a few admittedly “really trifling,” changes in form any guarantee for the continued allegiance of the wavering? If so, our Church has assuredly a slight claim on its adherents. Perhaps a more effectual cure for defection would be to hold out to the unstable, not mere ideal or sentimental recommendations, however congenial these may be to those loving “a show of wisdom in will-worship and humility,” but rather, if reference to this subject be deemed necessary, the beauty and simplicity of

the existing forms, and the yet greater beauty, simplicity and sanctity of the religion of which these forms are the mere concomitants. For after all,

“ Compared with this, how poor Religion’s pride,
 “ In all the pomp of method and of art,
 “ When men display to congregations wide,
 “ Devotion’s ev’ry grace, except the heart!”

Here I may incidentally mention, that the more plausible reason why not a few of the rising generation who were born Presbyterians, desert their own Church and connect themselves with other christian denominations, is not on account of the severity of our Church service, but rather on account of coldness and want of interest on the part of their co-religionists. Scotch Presbyterians are, perhaps, unhappily peculiar in this respect. Moreover, the increasing *mania* (in most cases pardonable) for wealth, and its consequent acquisition; the *mania* of others to be considered wealthy, and the common desire on the part of both “to do the grand,” chill the fellowship that should exist among the members of the same church, and drive some of our co-religionists to seek communion with other christian denominations of more congenial temperament, where greater sociality prevails and a greater interest is taken in the young, the poor, and the stranger in the congregation. Upon reflection it may occur to some, that this personal coldness, this want of christian cordiality, and not the “severely simple service that contented their parents,” is with many the most “grievous hindrance” to their remaining in communion with the Church of Scotland; and that more knowledge of the heroic struggles of our church, and a little more practical christianity among its members, and not a resort to a mere temporary sentimental subterfuge, would prove the surest *panacea* against desertion from its ranks.

But it is impliedly asserted by some that a change from the standing to the kneeling posture in prayer

would be "conducive to truer devotion," and that it would "help to make our frame of mind more devout." What a libel on christian intelligence! Is the nature of prayer affected by a bodily attitude? * Has not the testimony of all ancient and modern moralists and theologians been opposed to such an unpardonable misrepresentation? Have not CYPRIAN, TERTULLIAN, † ORIGEN, AMBROSE, AUGUSTIN, CHRYSOSTOM, and a host of other writers on the nature of prayer, taught that devotion depends "not on a certain posture of the body, but a certain posture of the heart," and buried centuries ago "the superstitious notion which attached great importance to certain bodily postures and certain outward ceremonies in prayer?" Why should modern Christians seek the resurrection of the errors of an age of superstition? Prayer consists in "worship, in spirit and in truth," not in form. ‡ "Prayer is the direct intercourse of the spirit of man with the spiritual and unseen Creator." || Mere corporal posture, then, can never constitute an element of devoutness in the sight of God. It is however maintained by some that kneeling is more impressive, (in the sight of man I presume, as the Creator is not likely to come under such influences.)

Query: Are those desirous of effecting a change in the mode of worship at prayer actuated by a desire to please God, or man? If to please God—they have chosen the wrong subject, for we have seen that the Deity is not likely to be affected by mere externals. But if to please man, then let us examine the innate characteristics of kneeling and standing as forms of worship at prayer,

* Froude, speaking of forms and ceremonies, thus summarily gibbets this crotchet:—"When we come to think that they possess in themselves "material and magical virtues, then the purpose which they answer is to "hide God from us, and make us practically into Atheists."

† "Deus non vocis, sed cordis auditor est, sicut conspensor." Tertul. de orat., § 13.

‡ Compare the example of the self-righteous pharisee and the penitent publican, both of whom stood.

|| Wayland's Moral Science, p. 170.

from a human stand-point, in so far as these are susceptible of examination and description. Taking the appreciation of peoples living synchronously with, or a few centuries after, our Saviour, we find as already stated that in some cases kneeling, when connected with public worship, was regarded as an attitude not of humility, but of humiliation, and that in contradistinction, standing was the attitude of prayer on the Lord's day in joyful thanksgiving for the resurrection of Christ. Granting, however, that kneeling is often expressive of humility and reverence, and that it is recognized by scriptural usage, it is in many respects but a relic of barbarism, and even in the present day, is not unfrequently expressive of fear, ignorance and debasement. The subject of the despot still cringes on bended knee in the presence of his master. And in imitation of this vestige of tyranny, by a strange interversion of etiquette for selfdom, ambassadors are accustomed, by way of courtesy, to kneel in the presence of an earthly sovereign, but in the presence of the majesty of genius and worth, the freest and most intelligent assemblies rise and remain standing in gratuitous, dignified, admiration, and reverence. This discrimination is not made in disparagement of forms adopted, and very properly cherished, by other christian denominations, neither is it purely volunteered; it is almost unavoidable from the necessity of ridiculing the puerile representations, not uncommonly urged, in favor of kneeling, as being a more reverent and more graceful position. Kneeling is unobjectionable in itself as a posture of prayer, but when its devotees in the Presbyterian Church, by way of comparison with the existing form, urge its superiority, we naturally ask for its pedigree. On the other hand, the standing attitude, apart from its scriptural sanction, is a posture better adapted to secure uniformity than kneeling, which has a tendency to degenerate into sitting. Standing, too, is expressive of truthfulness, confidence and hope, never of debasement, and

when connected with prayer in public assemblies, is indisputably impressive. This much at all events may be said of it, not by way of recommendation, because it needs no such aid—though a “severely simple” form of prayer, it has never been the attitude of idolatry; nor has any people, so long as they adhered to it as their posture in public prayer, ever become the slaves of political or ecclesiastical domination. Wherefore then, the alleged superiority of kneeling? Perhaps, however, kneeling, under some new system of discipline, has acquired devoutness and impressiveness from being interchangeable with, or rather supplemented by, the sitting posture at prayer. We make every allowance for the aged and infirm, it is meet that their comfort should be consulted. Kneeling, however, has not sated the popular taste for change, and the highly farcical sitting posture must needs bear sway as a compromise between the bad taste of standing, and the scarcity of kneeboards. Albeit, it is much more *distingué* to sit than stand at prayer, and this new hand-maid of innovation may in turn assert its priority of claim over kneeling, but I must forbear: I am an “Innocent abroad” at prophecy, and moreover I must not be irreverent; this may be some new attempt at “improvement in our Church service,” in keeping with “the much higher style of education that now obtains,” in order to enable the Church of Scotland “to hold her right place in the affections of the people generally and of the rising generation particularly,” with a view to “adapting her service to the tastes of an age of rapidly growing culture and refinement”!!

Now, having seen that the standing posture in public prayer is scriptural, that in the Presbyterian Church, there is a presumption in favour of its orthodoxy, and that these reasons are more than sufficient to warrant its continuance in that Church; having seen, moreover, that the claims of the kneeling posture, as against the

standing, on the alleged ground that the former is the more impressive and more "conducive to truer devotion," are altogether fallacious and visionary, and not founded either in fact or in moral science, we may conclude that there is no valid reason, pretext, or excuse for the attempted innovation of kneeling for standing in the Presbyterian Church.

But, as I am disposed to treat the subject on the broadest possible grounds, let us glance briefly at what might be termed its legal aspect and assume that there is plausible reason for the innovation of kneeling for standing. By what means could the change be legitimately effected? To appreciate this question we must understand the Presbyterian mode of Church Government. Unlike that in many other christian denominations it is effected by a gradation of Courts called respectively Kirk sessions, Presbyteries, Synods and Assemblies, "bound together," says Dr. HILL,* "by that subordination which is characteristical of Presbyterian Government," and forming a perfect safe-guard around the constitution and a barrier against innovation of any kind without a thorough investigation. In many other Christian denominations these superior judicatories do not exist; such are the Independents and Congregationalists. In these, the clergyman and trustees or deacons manage the affairs lay and ecclesiastical of the Church, and the Congregation itself is the highest Court of Appeal. In the Church of Scotland there is a judicial power vested in its four judicatories, but the legislative power both originates and ends with the General Assembly. In this Country this legislative power would I presume vest in the Synod. Each superior judicatory exercises a supervision over the inferior. Dr. HILL, † thus summarily defines this: "In all Governments conducted

* Theological Institutes.

† Theological Institutes.

“ by men, wrong may be done from bad intention, from
 “ the imperceptible influence of local prejudices, or from
 “ some other species of human infirmity. To prevent the
 “ continued exercise of wrong, it is provided in every good
 “ Government that sentences which are complained of
 “ may be reviewed..... This is the great principle
 “ of our republican constitution, which does not invest
 “ any individual with a control over his brethren, but
 “ employs the wisdom and impartiality of a greater num-
 “ ber of counsellors to sanction the judgments, or to cor-
 “ rect the errors of a smaller.”

“ The Kirk session,” says Dr. COOK, in his *Styles of procedure*, “ is the lowest judicatory in the Church of
 “ Scotland, and is composed of the minister of the parish,
 “ together with a certain number of lay elders.” Now,
 assuming that a number of persons wishing the standing
 posture in prayer to be displaced, and the kneeling one
 substituted therefor, should come to a Kirk session mak-
 ing representations in favour of the change, or assuming
 that the Kirk session itself, or any of its members, lay or
 clerical, should take the initiative in bringing about
 this change, it is plain that for want of jurisdiction
 it could not adjudicate on the merits of the ques-
 tion, either directly by taking a vote among its own
 members, or indirectly by referring the matter to the
 congregation. “ It is the business,” says Dr. COOK,*
 “ It is the business of the session to exercise a general
 “ superintendence over the religious state of the parish
 “ and the morals of the people, to settle the time for dis-
 “ pensing the ordinances of religion, to judge of the
 “ fitness of those who desire to partake of them, to exer-
 “ cise discipline on those accused or guilty of scandalous
 “ offences, and to grant certificates of character to par-
 “ ties removing from the parish.” There is nothing in
 this that can be construed into authority to tamper with

* *Styles of procedure in the Church Courts of Scotland.*

the existing forms of worship; the want of the legislative function in the Kirk session precludes the possibility of any legitimate attempts at innovation of any kind. But if further authority be required on this point, let us go the bottom of the question, and see what are the individual obligations of the members composing a Kirk session to preserve intact the existing worship. To say nothing of the "Barrier Act" passed in 1697, which, according to its preamble, was enacted for "preventing any sudden alteration, or innovation, or other prejudice to the Church, in either doctrine, worship, discipline or Government now happily established therein," let us see what are the ordination vows of an elder and minister respectively in the Presbyterian Church. First as to an elder. He must among other questions answer the following in the affirmative.

"Are you persuaded that the Presbyterian Government and discipline are founded upon the word of God and agreeable thereto?" "Do you promise that in your practice you will conform yourself to the said worship; that you will submit yourself to the said discipline and Government; that you will never endeavour directly, nor indirectly the prejudice or subversion of the same; and that you will follow no divisive courses from the present establishment in the Church."*

So much for the elder, now as to the minister; after ordination to his sacred office, he is required to subscribe a declaration embodying the substance of the questions that must be answered affirmatively by him before his appointment. It is as follows:—

"I do hereby declare that I do sincerely own and believe the whole doctrine contained in the Confession of Faith, approved by the general Assemblies of this national Church and ratified by law in the year 1690, and frequently confirmed by divers acts of Parliament since

* Hill's Practice, p. 7.

“ that time, to be the truths of God, and I do own the same
 “ as the confession of my faith ; as likewise I do own the
 “ purity of worship presently authorized and practised in
 “ this Church, and also the Presbyterian Government and
 “ discipline now so happily established therein ; *such doc-*
 “ *trine, worship and Church Government, I am persuaded are*
 “ *founded upon the word of God, and agreeable thereto ; and I*
 “ *promise that through the grace of God I shall firmly and con-*
 “ *stantly adhere to the same ; and to the utmost of my power*
 “ shall in my station assert, maintain, and defend the said
 “ doctrine, *worship, discipline, and Government of this*
 “ Church by Kirk sessions, Presbyteries, Provincial Syn-
 “ ods and General Assemblies ; *and that I shall in my prac-*
 “ *tice conform myself to the said worship and submit to the*
 “ said discipline and Government, and never endeavour,
 “ directly or indirectly, the prejudice or subversion of
 “ the same ; and I promise that I shall follow no divisive
 “ course from the present establishment in this Church ;
 “ renouncing all doctrines, tenets, and opinions what-
 “ ever, contrary to, or inconsistent with the said worship,
 “ discipline or Government of this Church.”*

Can we well conceive of a stronger document ? DANIEL O’CONNELL said he could drive a coach and four through any statute, but he probably would have made exception of the foregoing declaration, had he been aware of its existence. Yet we do find people in our day sufficiently presumptuous to try this feat, though I am not aware of any who have escaped strangling, at some stage of the attempt.

Among the acts of Parliament referred to in the foregoing declaration, is one passed in the reign of Queen Anne, Edinburgh, 1707 ; It is very important and provides, *inter alia*, “ that the form and purity of worship presently in use within this (Presbyterian) Church, and its Presbyterian Church Government and discipline, (that is

* Cook’s Styles of Procedure, pp. 96–7.

“ to say, the Government of the Church by Kirk sessions, “ Presbyteries, Provincial Synods, and General Assemblies, all established by the foresaid Acts of Parliament, “ pursuant to the claim of right) *shall remain and continue “ unalterable.*”

Whence then does a Kirk session derive its power to contravene the constitution of the Church? In fact, in Scotland, innovations are so effectually guarded against, that the General Assembly, (the highest Court and the only legislative body in the Church,) without the concurrence of a majority of the Presbyteries, cannot enact any standing law.

Seeing the restrictions placed on the highest Court in our Church, and with the duties and obligations of the individual members of a Kirk session so plainly and forcibly defined, it is obvious that to take cognizance of anything having reference to a change in the form of worship is beyond its jurisdiction. Neither should the matter be referred by the Kirk session to the Congregation, for this is ignoring the higher Courts and submitting it to an incompetent tribunal. The plain duty of a Kirk session, in the case supposed, would be to refer those desiring the change to the higher Courts. But should a Kirk session fail to do this and proceed to adjudicate on a matter beyond their control, either directly by taking a vote on the merits between themselves, or indirectly by ignoring the legitimate procedure, and referring it to the Congregation, then it is competent for any member of the Church into which the abuse has crept, to apply by complaint or appeal to the higher Courts against the illegal proceedings of the Kirk session, unless, through Christian charity, he should prefer to petition the latter directly, in order to allow this Court an opportunity to undo what it had illegally done or countenanced, and thus save itself the humiliation of having its illegal action condemned and quashed by the Superior tribunal.

Moreover so perfect is the judicial machinery of the Presbyterian constitution, and so perfectly protected is it, that in the event of no appeal or complaint being made against innovation, in individual churches, we are informed by Dr. HILL* that: "The Superior Court may take up the business by exercise of its inherent right of superintendence and control."
 "A Superior Court," continues the same high authority, "may at any time issue a peremptory mandate for the production of the books of its subordinate judicatories; and having the whole train of its proceedings thus regularly submitted to its inspection, it may take such measures, as upon this review appear to be necessary in order to correct errors, to redress wrongs, or to enforce the observance of general rules, &c."

"Such a right of executive power exercised with wisdom," says Dr. JAMIESON, "and in the spirit that should characterise a christian Court, is calculated to be of the greatest utility, as not only a check to the influx of irregularities, but a preservative of soundness and purity in doctrine, *as well as an orderly and uniform practice in all parts of the Church.*" †

It is obvious that a question affecting a change in the form of worship, should be brought up in the higher Courts, before it is submitted to the Congregation. The latter course is contrary to the whole spirit of Presbyterian Church Government, whereas the former is constitutional. The world is rapidly progressing; old things do pass away, and new ones come in their places; but surely if any proposed change have real merit and is likely to prove beneficial, its promoters have nothing to fear from submitting it to, and advocating its claims before, the intelligent assemblies that legislate for the peace and welfare of the Presbyterian Church.

* Hill's Theological Institutes.

† The Religions of the World, p. 147. London, 1870.

It may be said that the ordination vow of a minister is too stringent. Clergyman themselves should be the best judges of this matter. The laws and usages of the Church of Scotland are not unchangeable, like those of the Medes and Persians, but until they are changed it is perfectly legitimate to insist on their observance, and to protest against sinister attempts at ignoring their existence, on the part of those who are presumedly the best acquainted with them. It would probably be the better course, for persons wishing to promulgate opinions inconsistent with moral science, to contravene the constitution of our Church, and to tamper with matters calculated to disturb its peace and harmony—to look for some more congenial atmosphere beyond its pale. Or, if this sentence should appear too harsh, it assuredly is not unreasonable to demand, that those conscientiously desiring reform should at least be able to specify and prove the abuse, and to employ none but legitimate means in effecting its redress.

Now briefly let us assume that standing were legally displaced by the proper Court, and kneeling substituted therefor, in some leading Presbyterian Church, say in St. Paul's, which I only instance by way of illustration, as in it, happily, there are no restrictions respecting posture in worship. It has its peculiarities, but these are not in question at present. In St. Paul's, then, the result of the change, apart from the evil effects of investing forms with a presumed importance, would probably be twofold. First, it would be obnoxious to those attached to the old form, who, even should they be a small minority, would be entitled to have their opinions respected. Schism would be engendered, and the peace and harmony of the Congregation would be disturbed. It is no easy matter to persuade an aged person, deeply attached to the service of his Church that certain forms, which his judgment has approved for half a century, are becoming obsolete, and are now suscepti-

ble of "a large and acknowledged improvement." Such a person is rather disgusted with the idea of laying stress on a matter but slightly connected with true religion. Moreover he has a pardonable and natural preference for long established faultless form. This preference is to be found in religion itself. "A man born in a Mohometan country," says FROUDE, "grows up a Mohometan; in a Catholic country, a Catholic; in a Protestant country, a Protestant. His opinions are like his language; he learns to think as he learns to speak." Early association is a strong motive power.

Next, would not the other Presbyterian Churches throughout Canada be to some extent influenced by the action of a leading Congregation like that of St. Paul's, one to which many of these churches have been indebted for support and encouragement, and to whose pastoral management they have been accustomed to some extent to look for guidance? Would not innovation become contagious; what right would St. Paul's have to a monopoly? There is a strong presumption that many other churches would follow in its footsteps. Then what guarantee have we, that innovation would cease with the simple change of posture in prayer? Once we dispense with scripture and precedent in matters of form, we are infinitely worse off than the Episcopalians, for they have in addition, the guidance of a Book of Prayer, beyond the provisions of which they cannot go, whereas we would be perfectly at sea, bereft of rudder and keel, and without any certainty how soon we might be washed upon the shores of the Tiber. Speaking of Episcopalians, it is remarkable that the dissenters from Episcopacy gravitated towards the Presbyterian simplicity of form, and that the Church of England, saving a small section, finding that it could not hold its right place in the hearts of the people, in turn gravitated in the direction of the dissenters, and thus gained new life and vigour. Strange that in our day, Presbyterianism should drift in that very

direction which drove millions from Episcopacy, and attached them to the simpler forms of worship of the dissenters. It is no less remarkable that the only great defection that took place from the Church of Scotland, namely, that of the Free Church, was not by reason of any dislike to the forms of the Mother Church. It certainly cannot be said that those who broke away from the establishment in Scotland, in 1843, headed by the great CHALMERS, were lacking either in "style of education," intellectual ability, or in zeal to serve God. Yet they did not deem a renovation of the then existing worship necessary. Nay they adopted its forms to the letter, and the Free Church of the present day is a more determined conservator of these, than even the Kirk itself.

And, if we are to unite with this great christian body, the similarity of our Church forms is of inestimable importance. Neither would have to sacrifice anything in this respect. Now, keeping in view the desirability of a closer relationship with the Free Church, would it not be highly imprudent for individual churches, or for the Church of Scotland in Canada, as a whole, to introduce or countenance innovations, that would throw an obstacle in the way of the consummation of union between the two great Presbyterian families.

I consider this one circumstance of sufficient importance to warrant every true Presbyterian in vigorously opposing innovation in our forms, the very severity of which, through now alleged to be "a grievous hindrance to communion with the Church of Scotland," has won many adherents to her pale.

In conclusion perhaps some explanation is necessary. Did I not believe that much delusion exists on this subject I would not have undertaken to expose what I would fain believe to be a misconception arising from an error of judgment, or a want of proper appreciation of the

subject—though none the less dangerous on this account. This I have attempted to do by investigating the subject of posture in prayer. I have endeavoured to found my opinions on reason and the best authorities; with these weapons to meet every issue on its merits, and to deal with each as summarily as the circumstances seemed to require. It is not safe to toy with a serpent.

I have studiously endeavoured to avoid giving undue importance to form, and if a charge of this kind can be made against any one, it is assuredly against the innovator who would clothe non-essentials in religion with an importance not their own, and then dexterously attempt to escape the odium of his act by shifting the burden of responsibility on those who are satisfied with the formula that obtained in the Church of their fathers. To sow the seeds of discord with the hand and to shout peace with the lips, is an artifice too glaring, to escape condemnation.

Presbyterians cannot be said to have a bigoted attachment to their forms of worship; and as proof of this, few Congregations have refused to stand during singing when it was explained to them that this posture was better adapted, on scientific grounds, for engaging in this religious exercise than sitting, and when the request was unaccompanied with a proposal to change the whole character of their form of service. They have very properly been tenacious of the traditions and standards of their Church, and in this opinion many of the best and wisest divines have concurred. Let us hear the testimony of one of these, one whose name has hitherto at least been much revered by christians of all denominations in Canada; it will not be less respected because it comes from the tomb. He may perhaps speak with some authority—the professed servant of God for nearly half a century, a man of genuine piety, whose dignity of bearing, unabated in the presence of Royalty, preserved the indisputable *Status* of our Church,—but I should be

ashamed to write a panegyric for Dr. MATHIESON. I shall borrow the words of his mourning and eminent brother, who standing near his bier, paid just tribute to the memory of the dead ; “ We his copresbyters are called “ to mourn the loss of the father of our Presbytery, the “ father indeed of our Church in Canada.” Perhaps the opinions of such a man will still be respected. Here is one of them :—“ I am one of the old school, and “ cling to the forms that have done more for Scotland “ than any new fangled nostrums will ever accomplish “ for her. The piety of the people has been cherished “ and sustained by the good sense, deep thought and “ godly feelings of her ministers. As these qualities decay, somewhat of the LEE, TULLOCH, or STORY school “ may be brought in with seeming advantage for a time, “ but I am afraid that with such forms the people in this “ age will get formal too.”

It is pardonable to defend an existing all-sufficient custom, which by long continuance has acquired the force of law ; not so, to attempt its subversion by begging a preference for innovation. To adopt the latter course, is to cast an apple of discord into a Congregation, calculated to disturb its harmony, and to draw off the attention of the people from their eternal interests.

While the firebrand of innovation is in effect ingeniously contending that one attitude is more impressive, or “ more conducive to truer devotion,” and perplexing the minds of men with a fallacy, death, inexorable, snaps the thread that suspends frail man from eternity. The human ashes are committed to the grave ; which may be in the sacred, solemn Church yard, where, beside the narrow plot, there waves the weeping willow ; where, when the sun shines, a mother or a sister may sit and weep, and scatter sweet scented flowers ; which may be on the cold bleak hillside, where the piercing blast whistles a shrill lament amidst the ghost-like forms of tombs that strew the city of the dead ; or which may be in the deep un-

fathomable sea, down amidst the haunts of monsters, indigenous to a watery waste, the naturalist would like to investigate, but cannot. Soon the flesh becomes putrid, the ligaments become relaxed, maggots and lizards revel in the remains of human *debris*. Nor is the sea-tomb unmolested. Even there, those remains we once prided ourselves in making the instruments of worship, are not permitted the luxury of a common grave. The uncompromising wave, the voracious shark, and the innumerable horde of species inhabiting the depths of ocean, make common cause against their sepulture. But the great soul—where is it?

We believe that our Church has been a potent instrument of Christianity, even with its existing machinery. Let us not incur the risk of impairing its efficiency by displacing, without reason, forms that are all-sufficient for the purposes of Christian worship, and alienating the affections of thousands of its adherents who know and admire its history. The introduction of changes in the forms of worship, whether by the adoption of new attitudes in devotion, or the use of prescribed prayers, or a liturgy, simply means the *Episcopalizing* of Presbyterianism. I am afraid the latter will not stand the transformation; not by reason of any imperfection in the proposed model, which is a noble one, a system unique in itself and beautifully elaborated, but as ill-adapted for assimilation to Presbyterianism, as Presbyterianism, is to Episcopacy. Each system is the outgrowth of a different set of circumstances, has its own history, and its own characteristics, which even a fusion of both could not obliterate. A writer in the *Quarterly Review*, criticising the Duke of Argyll's Essay on Presbytery, which recommends the introduction of certain innovations in the Church of Scotland, among others a Liturgy, thus speaks of Presbyterianism as it exists:—"Whatever may be said or thought of it, at least it is definite, masculine and positive. It has a character of its own—a countenance of

" lines deep drawn and ineffaceable. It has shown a
 " tenacity of life, a substantiveness of view, an earnest-
 " ness of purpose, which give it a place exalted and
 " alone among its sisters of the Continental Reforma-
 " tion." And the same writer, commenting on the ad-
 visability of departing from the established formula of
 the Presbyterian Church, and of adopting certain innova-
 tions recommended by his Lordship, astutely remarks :
 " Their introduction, in a view which we may term
 " utilitarian, would do nothing for the true religious life
 " that undoubtedly and warmly breathes in Scottish
 " Presbyterianism, but would tend to formality, dryness,
 " and corruption. They would be as a fable without its
 " moral, as a lock without its key, as the bright colors of
 " the kaleidoscope, which present no meaning; nay,
 " they would exhibit a positive and repulsive incon-
 " gruity, as pointed architecture for a factory, or a crown
 " upon the head of President CASS. *They would give us*
 " *a travestied, not an enlarged Presbyterianism.* But we need
 " have no quarrel on this subject. *These are prescriptions*
 " *which the patient will certainly throw out of the window,*
 " *perhaps before the doctor has turned his back.*" " Severely
 simple" though the service of the Church of Scotland
 may be, it has resisted, since its adoption, the ceremonial
 inroads of two ecclesiastical hierarchies, and preserved
 its individuality unscathed through the furnace of reli-
 gious and political persecution. Shall we now relinquish
 it, without reason or advantage, to secure more fancy
 forms? Alas! that it should come to this, that the
 usages of our martyred reformers, endeared to the Scot-
 tish people by historical recollection, consecrated by the
 blood of the covenanter, founded on the warrant of Scrip-
 ture, and adapted to the unchanging christian require-
 ments of every age, should now give way to " the tastes
 of an age of rapidly growing culture and refinement!"
 If these are to be changed, let us at least have a reason,
 and the change effected by the proper means. But if no

valid reason can be assigned for their subversion, then let us transmit them to posterity, intact as we received them, a sacred legacy from a people that detested formality, and loved religion for its own sake—an heirloom from an age of purity, simplicity, and truth.

TABLE SHOWING COMPARISON OF TEXTS.

STANDING.		KNEELING.	
PUBLIC PRAYER.	PRIVATE PRAYER.	PUBLIC PRAYER.	PRIVATE PRAYER.
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Nehemiah ix, 1-15 : Solemn fast and repentance of the people of Israel 2. Nehemiah viii, 1-6 : Ezra's prayer. 3. Leviticus ix, 5-6. 4. 2 Chron. xxx, 27. 5. Deut. xviii, 5. 6. Ezra x, 14. 7. Numb. xvi, 9. 8. Psalm cxxxiv, 1. 9. 1 Kings viii, 22-26 : Solomon stood praying before the Altar. 10. — do. verse 55. 11. 2 Chron. vi, 3 : The congregation stood. 12. Mark vi, 5. 13. Mark xi, 25 : "When ye stand praying, forgive," &c. 14. 1 Kings viii, 14. 15. " " 55. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Genesis xviii, 22. 2. Genesis xix, 27. 3. 1 Samuel i, 26-27 : Hannah's prayer of thanksgiving. 4. 2 Chron. xxxiv, 31. 5. Job xxx, 20. 6. Luke xviii, 11-14 : The prayers of the Publican and Pharisee. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 1 Kings viii, 54 : Solomon knelt before the altar. 2. Chron. vi, 13. 3. Ezra ix, 5. 4. Psalm xcvi, 6. 5. Isaiah xlv, 23. 6. Mark v, 19 : The soldiers worshipped Christ. 7. Acts xxi, 5. 8. Acts xx, 36 : Paul prays with the Ephesian Elders. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dan. vi, 10. 2. Acts vii, 60. 3. Acts ix, 40. 4. Eph. iii, 14. 5. Philip. ii, 10. 6. Luke xxii, 41.

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