A MANUAL OF THE LITANY, WITH QUESTIONS FOR EXAMINATION

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BY S. W.

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"STORIES FOR EVERY SUNDAY IN THE CHRISTIAN YEAR;"

"READINGS ON SOME OF OUR LORD'S PARABLES," &c.

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PREFACE.

THIS little Manual has been compiled from the standard Commentaries on the Prayer Book and the Litany, to meet, in the first place, a special case in the Diocese of Exeter, *i. e.* the preparation of candidates in the subjects given out by the Board of Examiners for the examination for the Bishop's Prayer Book Prizes, in the year 1865.

It is hoped, however, that the Manual may be found useful generally for instruction in this portion of the Book of Common Prayer; the more so as there is every probability that the plan which is productive of so much good in the Diocese of Exeter, will in some form or other be adopted before long in Church Schools throughout the country.

In this case the Author proposes to draw up similar manuals on the other Services and Offices of the Church of England.

The little work is largely indebted to the kindness of the Rev. F. Ensor, Rector of Lustleigh, who has afforded much valuable assistance to its Author during its compilation, and has revised it very carefully.

A MANUAL OF THE LITANY.

INTRODUCTION.

THE word Litany means earnest supplication; but it was very soon applied in the Christian Church to a particular form of prayer, in which the priest utters short requests, and the people respond to them; and it is so applied in our Prayer Book. This kind of prayer is very ancient. Some learned men believe that the Jews said Litanies as a part of their synagogue services in the time of our Lord; and without doubt they have been used in both branches of the Christian Church at least from the fourth century.

1. In the Eastern Church. St. Basil affirms that Litanies were read in the Church of Neocaesarea between the time of Gregory Thaumaturgus, (A.D. 250,) and his own time, A.D. 370; and St. Chrysostom (A.D. 397) speaks of the Litanies which had been used while the Church still possessed the miraculous presence of the Spirit in prayer.

2. In the Western Church. St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, A.D. 374, wrote a Litany which still bears his name, and which in many points is like the Litany of the English Church. And about A.D. 600, at the time of a great mortality, St. Gregory the Great, out of all the Litanies extant, composed one which has ever since served for a model of this kind of prayer. This was the St. Gregory who sent St. Augustine and a company

of missionaries to convert the Saxon inhabitants of Britain; and we are told that when they reached Canterbury they made their entrance into the city chanting a solemn Litany.

St. Gregory's Litany was called the sevenfold Litany, because he divided the people into seven classes when they walked in procession to repeat it. This custom of saying their prayers while walking in procession through the streets had come into use two hundred years before, but on the people growing disorderly it was given up, and an order put forth that Litanies should for the future only be used within the walls of the churches.

At first, Litanies were only said in times of public distress, such as famine, wars, pestilences, earthquakes, storms, &c., but A.D. 452 Mamercus, Bishop of Vienne, established the Rogation days, *i.e.* three days of prayer preceding Ascension Day, and appointed Litanies to be used then.

Their use at this season soon became general in the Western Church. Two centuries later they were said every month throughout Spain; and so by degrees these solemn supplications came to be used on Wednesdays and Fridays in every part of the Church.

The Litany of the English Church is ordered in the Rubric to be said on Sundays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Sunday is the day when the greatest number of people is present to join in the supplications, and Wednesday and Friday are the days of our Blessed Lord's betrayal and crucifixion. It may also be said at other times, when it shall be commanded by the Ordinary, *i.e.* the Bishop of the diocese, or other duly qualified ecclesiastical officer.

Many ancient forms of Litanies have come down to us, besides those of St. Ambrose and St. Gregory, already mentioned. That of the English Church is like many of these forms, but not exactly the same with any one of them. It most resembles one in a devotional book called the Primer, written in English, and used by private Christians in our country as early as the fourteenth century, only it is more penitential. It con-

tains more confession of sin, and deeper self-abasement. In the Invocation we call ourselves "miserable sinners," words not contained in that old form. The prayer that God will not remember our offences nor those of our forefathers is new, and so are the words at the beginning of the Supplications, "We *sinners* beseech Thee to hear us."

The Rubric gives no direction about the posture in which the Litany should be said, but our natural feeling suggests that such humble penitential prayers cannot properly be said otherwise than upon our knees. Besides which, the injunction of Queen Elizabeth, A. D. 1559, which still has the force of law, contains these words: "The priests, with others of the choir, shall kneel in the midst of the church, and say or sing plainly and distinctly the Litany, which is set forth in English, with the suffrages following."

When the priest kneels, the people of course must kneel too. The midst of the church is named as the place for saying the Litany, doubtless in allusion to the command of God to the Jews; "Let the Priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare Thy people, O Lord," (*Joel*, ii. 17.) And the Litany is still sung or said in that part of the building in Cathedrals, and in many churches.

Our Litany may be divided into four parts. The Invocation, or calling upon God; the Deprecations, or prayers that evil may be averted; the Intercessions, or prayers for others; and the Supplications, or general prayers.

I. THE INVOCATION.

O God the Father, of Heaven: have mercy upon us, miserable sinners.

O God the Son, Redeemer of the world: have mercy upon us, miserable sinners.

O God the Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son: have mercy upon us, miserable sinners.

O holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity, three Persons and one God: have mercy upon us, miserable sinners.

Do we ask why we should begin our petitions with thus calling on the Name of God? We have His own assurance that it is well pleasing to Him so to do. He has said, "They shall call on My Name, and I will hear them;" (*Zech.* xiii. 9.) and, "He shall call on Me, and I will answer him." (*Psalm* xci. 15.)

1. We call upon *God the Father* Almighty, of Whom it is said in the Athanasian Creed, "The Father is made of none: neither created, nor begotten." He is "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," (1 *Peter*, i. 3.) the Father Who "hath life in Himself;" (*St. John*, v. 26.) and we may call Him "Abba, Father," (*Gal.* iv. 6.) because He hath bestowed such love upon us that we should be called the sons of God. (1 *St. John*, iii. 1.) We say God the Father, partly because He is the Father of all things by creation—"Is He not thy Father that hath bought thee? hath He not made thee, and established thee?" (*Deut.* xxxii. 6. See also *Isa.* lxiv. 8.) partly because He is the Father of all Christians by adoption—"As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His Name;" (*St. John*, i. 12. See also *Eph.* i. 5.) but chiefly because He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort." (2 *Cor.* i. 3. See also *Eph.* i. 3.) We say *of Heaven*, because the throne of God—His chief place of honour—is in Heaven. "Thus saith the Lord, the Heaven is My throne." (*Isa.* lxvi. 1. See also *St. Matt.* v. 34.)

2. We call upon *God the Son*, of Whom it is said in the Athanasian Creed, "The Son is of the Father alone: not made, nor created, but begotten;" and in the Nicene Creed, "And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God; begotten of His Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father." He is the Word of God—"In the