

Our Contributors.

The Service of Public Prayer.

A movement to improve Divine Worship in our congregation is a subject which comes within the scope of the aims and works of the Men's Associations. By the constitution, our object is to foster an intelligent interest in everything which pertains to the church's welfare and to prosecute definite and organized Christian efforts for the general benefit.

A matter which the Executive Committee regard of high importance, has been brought to the attention of the Association, in the following letter addressed to the President.

Halifax, Aug. 27, 1904.

Dear Sir—Early in May last I sent to each member of the Association a brochure on Divine Worship. My purpose was to bring to the individual attention of each member a subject dealt with by some well-known writers,—a subject of great importance to our church, which I regard as worth considering by the Association.

In a recent issue of the Halifax Presbyterian Witness (Aug. 20th), I find an article expressing the opinions of Rev. Dr. John Watson, (Ian McLaren), I enclose it herewith and ask you to bring it to the notice of the Association.

I would further request you to explain to the Association the fact that there is a movement in the Presbyterian church in the United States, headed by Rev. Dr. Henry Van Dyke, of Princeton, the subject of which is to make worship in the churches more worshipful. This movement is referred to in "The Interior of Chicago," July 7, 1904. I regret I am unable to enclose a copy.

Yours Sincerely,

SANDFORD FLEMING.

The following are the views of Rev. Dr. John Watson on changes in worship in the Presbyterian church.

"Our people have a right to open their mouths in praise. Our people also have a right to open their mouths in prayer. At present it is left to the minister to pray for anything which he pleases, and to leave out anything which he pleases. His prayers may consist of petitions, or it may be an exposition of doctrine, or an explanation of his own spiritual condition, or it may be a reflection of his state of health. He may conclude a service without offering supplication for the King, for our country, for the sick, for the bereaved, for those in danger for those whom we love. Ought not the people to know, at least in large part, what is going to be asked, as they know what is going to be sung? Ought they not to have some security that their common wants, confessions, and thanksgivings shall be presented to God? And following out the principle which we all feel should be applied to praise, ought they not to have some opportunity of joining in the prayer of the congregation by repetition or response? Why should the Church exercise supervision over praise and none over prayer? I am not arguing for the prohibition of free prayers, which ought to be included in every service, and without which the service would not be complete, but I am suggesting that the time has fully come when our Church should provide certain forms of common prayer for her people. Certain ministers may take great trouble about the service of prayer, but others may take no trouble at all, so that it

may be difficult to know whether they are preaching or praying, and whether they are addressing man or God. Certain ministers, again, may be greatly gifted with the grace of prayer, and their supplications may be so satisfying that the people will not miss a form of common prayer, but others may be so barren and arid, or so eloquent and non-religious, that their prayers become rather a hindrance and an offence than a help and comfort to the people. And if anyone should say that such men are not fit to be ministers, and that the real relief lies in having a more spiritual ministry, I remember that some of the finest and most devout scholars the Church has had were almost incapable of public prayer, and also, curious to say, that some of the most earnest and evangelical ministers I have known used to offer prayers which had every disadvantage of a liturgy in being a repetition of the same words each Lord's Day, without the advantage of a liturgy, inasmuch as their prayers were neither beautiful in language nor comprehensive in supplication. If one were to try the depth of a man's piety, or his accurate knowledge of Holy Scripture, or his sympathy with his people, or his understanding of the wants of humanity, or his reverence towards God, by his prayers, many a good minister would be seriously misjudged. A book of common prayer would serve to bind the Church together, to invest our worship with beauty and dignity it would give the worshippers living and tender interest in the service, protect them from what is sometimes wearisome and sometimes offensive, and lift a heavy burden from the minds and consciences of our more spiritual and earnest clergy."

At the general meeting of the Association held in the church lecture room on October 17th last, the matter was brought up, when it was resolved that it be referred to a meeting of the Executive Committee the following week.

The Executive met on October 24th when Sir Sandford Fleming, being present by invitation, entered into the following explanation:

I am asked to introduce the subject. I think my best way is to read a few extracts from my letters addressed to the convener of the Committee on Public Worship of the General Assembly some eight or nine years ago.

(1) A distinctive feature of public worship in our Church is the absence of participation by the congregation in the service. Exclusive of the musical portion, the whole service devolves upon the minister alone. There are many persons, both laymen and ministers, who entertain the opinion that what ever may have been the causes which determined the present usages, the time has arrived when, in the interests of the Church in Canada, it is desirable to consider the extent to which the usages may be modified, so that a larger participation may be accorded to the congregation in the service of divine worship.

As worship is now ordered, the people enter their pews, and, throughout the whole service, until the benediction is pronounced, no opportunity is vouchsafed to them, except to a very limited extent, to take part in the service. All present are at liberty to join in the psalms and hymns when they are sung, but if the music selected be un-

familiar, or if any present feel their own incapacity, or for any reason soever take no part in this portion of the service, such persons, from the moment they enter the building to the time they leave it, continue to be listeners to whatever may be said or sung. Except by their presence they take no active part in the service other than by assuming an erect or sitting posture as custom prescribes.

The minister offers the prayers and delivers the discourse. The thoughts to which he gives expression, both in the prayers and in the sermon, are his own. They are formulated in his own words and until expressed are unknown to any individual. Members of the congregation, outwardly at least, take no part in the fulfilment of the purpose for which they have come together. It is difficult to recognize this service, partaking of the character of a monologue, as the highest development of united congregational worship under Presbyterian polity.

(2) The principles of Presbyterianism are unalterable, but the history of the Church establishes that the system admits of changes in practice when such are required. The introduction of instrumental music may be cited as an illustration. Forty years ago the proposal to place an organ in a Presbyterian church created alarm. Thirty years ago the actual introduction of instrumental music in Old Greyfriars, Edinburgh, startled and shocked many of our people. Such a thing had been unknown in the Scottish Presbyterian Church. To day the organ is generally welcomed in all our places of public worship on both sides of the Atlantic.

There are fewer objections to forms of prayer than were entertained to the introduction of musical instruments. The latter were not recognized by the fathers and founders of the Church, while the former were sanctioned by them, and prayers were regularly read in public worship for generations after the Reformation. The introduction of organs was an innovation not warranted by any traditional standard, while the introduction of written prayers is perfectly justifiable on historical grounds.

(3) I do not advocate the re-introduction of a Liturgy. If our worship is to be reformed in my judgment the best reform will partake of the character of a development springing from the usage we now follow. To attempt the restoration of a Liturgy would in my view be unwise and ill-advised. The effect would be to postpone indefinitely the adoption of improvements in our services greatly more important than the re-introduction of any formal Liturgy. We have outgrown the conditions of the 16th century when Calvin and Knox and those associated with them found Liturgies expedient. It seems to me that the new conditions demand something better than a Liturgy, that they certainly point to a change of some kind perhaps a remodelling of the present observed form of worship.

These sentences will suffice to indicate to you the views I have long held and still hold. Many persons on both sides of the Atlantic hold similar views. You have heard what the Rev. Dr. Watson has to say and he may be taken to represent thoughtful Presbyterians in the United Kingdom. In the collection of writings which I have placed in your hands, you will find at some length the opinions of the Rev. T. F. Fotheringham of St. John, N. B. the Rev. Dr. Pollok, lately Principal of the Presbyterian College, Halifax, and Moderator of the General Assembly, the Rev. Dr. Hastings, President of Union Theological Seminary, New York