

would also be given for the introduction of hymns or psalms, and some extension of the musical part of the service. In connection with the matter of Scripture reading, it may not be inappropriate at this point to suggest that during the collection of the offering passages of Scripture be read by the minister appropriate to the subject of Christian liberality. The effects of a few chords of music from the organ between each text, greatly intensifies the force of the respective passages. This practice seems more becoming and suitable than to ask the congregation to listen to the performance of a piece of music on the organ during this part of the service. Anything, in fact, which tends to impress the people with the truth that the offering of our means to God is an act of worship is desirable, as this part of our service is too often regarded as a secular interruption.

It may be not out of place to refer here to the manner of reading the Scripture during our service. It is deeply to be regretted that so frequently we find but little attention paid to this very important matter. Of late years there has been an improvement in this direction, but much yet requires to be accomplished. The spread of education has rendered the occupants of our pews more generally alive to the defects of the Scripture reader. Poor reading, added to failure to attend to punctuation in such verses for example as Heb. x. 12, and the mispronunciation of words and proper names are flies which spoil the apothecary's ointment and lesson to a very considerable extent the confidence of educated persons in the knowledge and accuracy of preparation of the pastor. When one hears a minister floundering about among the names of those saluted by Paul, or tripping over the foundation stones of the heavenly city, we may know what to expect from the sermon. How often have we seen, for example, the quantity of the penultimate of the word which was applied as a test to the Ephraimites of old prove as hard a problem to the modern preacher as the first syllable did to the fugitives from Gilead. Grave doubts too are sometimes raised in the mind of the hearer if the reader knew whether the Urbane of Rom. xvi. 9, was a man or a woman, or what was the sex of Junia (v. 7.) The wrestlings of some readers with the Scripture names are positively painful. They have not always the same ingenuity as had the Highland minister who after one bravo but indifferent attempt with Shadrach Meshach and Abodnego, evaded any further difficulty by referring to them as "the same three boys," or a pastor to the south of the Border who grappling with the same worthies took refuge more elegantly in the speaking of them as "the said three gentlemen." Such foxes spoil the grapes, and when a minister on a Monday morning receives on his table something like the following:

"Last night you said your words did pain us,
You know the household of Stephanus,
Stephanus is the man we know
And may we hope you'll call him so."

he will know that to some of his hearers his sermon was as water spilt on the ground.

The responsive reading of passages of Scripture would form a great improvement in our worship and would increase the interest of the people in our service, as well as tend to impress the truth on their minds. As before mentioned, one of the great defects in our order of worship is the smallness of the part taken by our people in it. Anything which would serve to secure the congregations taking a share in the proceedings, would ensure greatly to enliven the service as well as awaken a closer attention to the contents of the Scripture itself. The parallelisms of many of the Psalms evidently show that they were intended to be said or sung by way of response. Such responsive reading is common enough in our Sabbath schools, and there appears to be no reason for not introducing it into our churches.

Opinions may greatly differ as to the manner of conducting the musical part of the service, but there seems to be little doubt that an increased use of music would be regarded as a much needed improvement. The general increase of musical knowledge and the attention paid to culture in this branch of education, imperatively calls for a radical change in our ecclesiastical music. Our young people call for it, and when we consider how powerful is the effect for good on body, soul and spirit is music of a sacred character, it is desirable that their wish be gratified. It is, in fact, necessary, if we intend to keep our young people with us. Nothing could be further from the mind of the writer than to advocate an elaborate musical service or anything approaching to a musical performance. Everything tending in this direction ought to be rigorously excluded. The introduction of solos and anthems, sung only by an individual or a choir must be very carefully regulated by our sessions, for unless this be done there is usually but one result, and that sacred (!) concert, the organ recital, and the advertised musical programmes follow in due course. In face of the fact patent to all observers that the singing of some beautiful hymn by the single voice of some Christian man or woman has often most powerfully effected individuals and audiences, it would be idle to condemn solo singing in toto. If, however, it is to be employed in our services care must be taken that the singer be one of pronounced Christian character. In fact no leader of our church music or chorister ought to occupy that position unless they are members of some Christian church. In view of the importance of the service of praise, it is extraordinary that congregations are found employing precursors and singers who are confessedly without Christian profession. The revival of the chant would afford a pleasing and delightful variation in our worship. This has been again brought into use in the Free Church of Scotland and the English Presbyterian Church and some of our own congregations with advantage. Something of this kind appears to have been the method in use among the Hebrews in their musical service in the Temple, when anything akin to our tunes could certainly not have been practised. It is very strange that in the face of the knowledge of this fact, and that the very structure of some of the Psalms shows that they must have been composed for this style of music, such an unreasoning opposition should exist in some quarters to the use of this very ancient and impressive form of praise.

"The preaching of the cross" being "the power of God" is necessarily the chief part of the proceedings in a Christian assembly. No reader of the New Testament can fail to observe the great prominence given to preaching by the apostles. Although in a paper like the present, which only attempts to suggest topics for discussion, it is impossible to enter into a careful consideration of such an important subject, it may be permissible to refer to it particularly, as all lectures and discourses on preaching have, so far as the writer has observed, been delivered by preachers themselves, while the occupants of the pews have kept silence. In the early church the preaching was of a very different character from that of a modern sermon, or theological or moral essay. The preacher did not stake a single verse as a text and decant on that, surrounding it with much that has but a nominal connection with it. The ancient preacher was rather a teacher than a preacher, in the modern acceptance of the term. It appears to the writer that a return to the former practice, to some extent at least, would be desirable. Were our elders, who labour in word and doctrine, to devote more attention to expository teaching it would ensure greatly to the increase in scriptural knowledge of the hearers. The comparison of Scripture with Scripture in the face of the congregation tends to awaken interest, and increase attention in divine things. This public breaking of the word of life invariably leads to a desire to study the Scripture in private as well as in public. Such congregational study of the word of God has always had the effect of quickening spiritual life, and bears much fruit in Christian activity. Men feel more in this way that the Word is indeed spirit and life, than they do when listening to a modern sermon constructed on the mechanical regulation methods of a threefold division. They feel more that Christ is speaking in His Word to them, and that they are listening to the Word of God rather than to the expression of human opinion. Consecutive expositions of books of Scripture are eminently instructive and beneficial. They are advantageous also, inasmuch as in the course of such, they permit ministers to address their congregations incidentally on matters regarding which any special sermon might give offence without accomplishing any benefit. It may be said in reference to this that denunciations from the pulpit of certain social practices are worse than useless. They awaken hostility among those aimed at, and are not needed by spiritually minded persons. Such diatribes are too frequently based on very inaccurate information on the part of the preacher who might more profitably devote his attention to awakening an intelligent interest in the Word of God. Any social usages not in keeping with Christian life would gradually be abandoned. The "world" gets larger as spiritual life increases. The introduction into pulpit discourses of vulgar expressions and words savouring of slang is deeply to be regretted. If any preacher imagines that this takes the common people he is profoundly mistaken. The common folk among Presbyterians have no taste for this sort of thing. They are too intelligent, and a pastor's influence among them speedily goes when he so far forgets himself and brings the pulpit into contempt.

These few suggestions are offered as to the direction in which reforms may be effected, which might tend to render our services more attractive without affecting their spirituality, and which might aid in retaining among us many persons who drift away to other connection where the Gospel of Christ and the Doctrines of Grace are not so faithfully proclaimed as in that Church which is so dear to us, and for which we may in the words of the old Presbyterian liturgy unite in praying—

"Let thy mighty hand and outstretched arm, O Lord, be still our defence. Thy mercy and lovingkindness in Jesus Christ. Thy dear Son, our salvation. Thy true and holy Word our instruction. Thy grace and Holy Spirit our comfort and consolation unto the end and in the end."

For the Sabbath School. Trial of Abraham's Faith.

INTERNATIONAL S. S. LESSON FEB. 25: GEN. XXII. 1-13.

GOLDEN TEXT.—By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac.—Heb. xi., 17.

THE CIRCUMSTANCES.—Let us take a glance over the intervening years. Very soon after the destruction of Sodom, Abraham left that region and went southerly and dwelt in the vicinity of the Philistines. Here again, as in Egypt, Abraham's faith showed an imperfection in its hold on his daily life. After this he dwells at peace with his Philistine neighbours, passing gently into a quiet, serene old age, and still strong and vigorous, though 125 years old.

Isaac was born as the reward of faith. As he grew up Abraham showed weakness in yielding to Sarah's request, and the boy a rough conduct, and sending away Hagar and his son Ishmael, now grown to be an active boy of fourteen to seventeen years. It was a bitter trial to Abraham. We need only notice the instructive incident of Hagar and Ishmael almost dying of thirst, while a well of water was close at hand, unseen till the angel showed it to her. So often we mourn when consolation is close by us unseen. We lament bitterly when the water of life is at our side. We are weak, we are despairing, we cry in the dark when God is very near with help. So Bunyan's Pilgrims in Giant Despair's Castle felt themselves utterly lost and hopeless, though the key of promise was all the time in Hopeful's possession. So the sailors at the mouth of the Amazon were perishing of thirst, not knowing where they were, and that the fresh waters of the great river were on every side.

There always comes a special danger in times of long-continued placid existence, moving on in the even tenor of the way, like seasons without cloud or storm. Rust and malaria may injure as really as storms and hard usage. A sudden and strong trial would (1) increase Abraham's faith; (2) give him a consciousness of his faith, an assurance to his own soul; (3) show his faith to those who were unbelievers; (4) call attention to it as a bell does to a fire; (5) make him a teacher and exemplar of faith to all after ages.