

UNIFORMITY IN PUBLIC WORSHIP.

Editor of RECORD :

DEAR SIR,—The General Assembly in June last appointed a committee "to consider the whole question of Uniformity in Public Worship" in the Presbyterian Church in Canada, and report to next Assembly. This Committee met in Montreal on the 26th of November last. I have been requested by them to prepare a statement regarding their action in the matter, with your kind consent to be laid before all the members of the Church in the pages of the RECORD.

To prepare the way I issued a circular on September 1st to all the members of the Committee, asking them to send me their opinion regarding such particular points as would naturally come under the notice of the Committee in terms of the Assembly's remit.

The Committee consisted of 17 ministers and 12 elders. Of these, 14 ministers and 5 elders sent replies more or less full. These show that there is much interest among the members of the Committee in this matter. They also show, on the whole, a great degree of unanimity in sentiment; while there is a difference of opinion very decided on some point, which undoubtedly reflects correctly, if not proportionately, a like diversity of view existing among the members of the Church generally.

In addressing themselves to the work before them, the Committee were deeply impressed with the importance of their task, connected as it is alike with fundamental principles in Divine worship, the history of the Scottish churches, and the directing and fostering of the Christian life in its outward expressions in united worship. Their responsibility they saw to be grave; and they were convinced that whatever is done must be done with care, without haste, and with a proper regard to the usages of the past, so as to carry with the Church Courts the sympathy, judgment and conscience of our people generally.

The material necessary for the work is abundant. Other Reformed churches, as well as the Scotch Church, from the Reformation to the present day, have given much attention to the proper conduct of public worship; and no part thereof was overlooked, as is apparent from the history of the several churches. Of late, interest in the question has been revived in Scotland, and the associations of the Established, United Presbyterian, and Free Churches, have, in their publications, done almost all that is required to set the question before the Church in clear light. Besides these, several small books have been written, fully and freely discussing the subject.

It is admitted that in Canada there is much diversity in practice, especially in connection with the dispensation of the Sacraments. By

many ministers prepared services are used, taken from at least four different books. This is not desirable; but it shows the expediency of having a service book prepared, which may serve as a model, or, if the minister and people prefer, may be used on these solemn occasions. If this is not done, very soon an undesirable diversity will be established, tending seriously to interfere with the edification of many worshippers and distracting attention by the novelty of practices here and there introduced. How best to meet this state of things, by providing wise guidance, is the question now to be considered.

1. The first point considered by the Committee was: What order of service is most suitable for public worship ordinarily on the Lord's day? The answers to this question show virtual unanimity, so far as the parts of the service are concerned.

There are, however, differences as to the order of the parts. The answers in many cases give the order used by the writer; and we know that two Presbyteries have prepared an order of service for the use of congregations within their bounds. The differences are mainly such as these: Shall the service begin with prayer or a doxology? What shall be the number of prayers, and how shall the several parts of prayer be taken up? Where should the Lord's Prayer come in—by itself or at the close of another prayer? When should the offering be given—before or after sermon? When should pulpit notices be given? Should a portion from both the Old and New Testaments be read at each service, and where should they come in?

In the opinion of the Committee there should be no difficulty in preparing an order of service which should be generally acceptable throughout the Church. It was also thought that the service should not generally extend beyond one hour and twenty minutes; rather should be shorter. The Committee, therefore, appointed a sub-committee to prepare an order of service for general use, understanding that some parts should be omitted where the service requires to be shortened. The Committee also was instructed to see that a proper proportion of time be assigned to each part of worship.

2. The second question had reference to the responsive reading of appropriate portions of Scripture; the audible recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the people accompanying the minister; also of the Apostle's Creed, and the reading publicly of the Ten Commandments. Some object to responsive reading as incompatible with the intelligent use of Scripture, and often tending to destroy its sense. The audible repetition of the Lord's Prayer was generally approved of; also the use of the Creed and the Ten Commandments from time to time, particularly in connection with the observance of the Lord's Supper, as was the usage of the Church in former times.