

Our Contributors.

SHORT AND LONG SERMONS.

BY KNOXONIAN.

The hot season brings up the old question—How long should a sermon be? The only thing some people ever discuss about a sermon is its length. That is not a good sign of the times. More discussion about the matter of sermons and their likelihood to convert sinners and edify believers would be a much better sign.

"That is just the right length for an evening sermon," says some hearer as he leaves church. Well, that is a good enough thing to say. A better thing would be to say "that sermon was well adapted to awaken the careless and bring sinners to Christ." The one remark would show that the hearer was thinking mainly about the time spent in hearing; the other that he was thinking about the salvation of souls. The main question about any sermon is, Was it a sermon likely to do good to anybody?

The question, How long should a sermon be? has very little point in it. As the lawyers say about their pleas, "it is void by generality." Everything depends on the preacher, the character of the sermon and the circumstances under which the sermon is delivered. Some sermons are short at forty-five minutes and some long at ten. Time has very little to do with the matter. Everything depends upon how you *feel* about it. If you feel interested and edified, time soon slips past; if you feel that the sermon is something that must be *endured*, then a ten minute sermon seems terribly long.

Allowance, too, must be made for surroundings. Hearers have bodies as well as souls, and if the physical man is uncomfortable the attention of the best hearer cannot long be retained. If the body of a church is poorly ventilated and the gallery as hot as a Turkish bath, a hearer needs to strain considerably to follow any preacher for an hour. Spurgeon says that next best thing to the grace of God in a church is pure air. The same high authority declares that some places of worship are less comfortable than Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego found Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace. The great London preacher says he could not pray for the preservation of such places of worship from fire if he knew they were well insured. The deacons of his Park Street church refused to fix the upper part of the windows so that fresh air could be let into the room, and somebody broke the windows and ventilated the building. Spurgeon says he often walked with the cane that did the deed.

Beyond all doubt, surroundings should regulate to some extent the length of a sermon. If a church is so heated that the heads of the hearers are in hot air and their feet like iceblocks, the sermon should not be long. It is not in human nature to listen long in that condition with any degree of attention.

Then, too, the kind of day makes a good deal of difference. In a sharp, clear, frosty day in winter one can listen much longer than in a hot day in July or a leaden day in November.

Somebody who vainly hopes to put the world right by finding fault with it, is ready to say, If people were what they ought to be they would not be so particular about the length of sermons. To which we simply add, If people were what they ought to be they wouldn't need sermons at all.

It is quite true that if people were more spiritually minded they would not attach so much importance to the mere externals of worship. It is also true that foul air and half-frozen feet will mar the devotion of the ripest saint as well as that of the weakest believer. Ministers often tell us that they preach much better in some places than in others; that they have much more freedom at certain times than at others. Well, if the surroundings affect the man who preaches, why blame the hearer if he is not equally attentive and retentive at all times?

Those who hold that the desire for short sermons is undoubted evidence of declining piety, say that the people who demand short sermons will listen to a political orator for a whole evening. To which it may be replied that political orators are heard about once in three or four years, while many people hear two sermons every Sabbath. The best political orator in Canada can't address the same audience one hundred times a year. The people would not attend. There is no sense in comparing the length of a speech de-

livered once in four or five years with the length of a sermon. A preacher who could not hold the attention of an audience for two hours if he preached only once in four years ought to be ashamed of himself.

The clock is no standard to measure a sermon by. There are weightier considerations than the mere fact that the clock handle has come round. No specific time can or should be fixed at which every preacher must stop, but there are a few common sense rules that it might not hurt any ordinary preacher to consider.

A preacher who delivers his sermon in one key should never—well hardly ever—preach as long as one who can go up and down the scale. Monotony or sing-song can never hold the attention as long as a free natural delivery.

A sermon well illustrated may be made longer than one that has little or no illustration. Plain didactic statements coming one after another like soldiers in single file soon weary the best of hearers.

Sermons in which doctrinal points are discussed in technical language should be short. The popular mind soon wearies of technicalities.

Mere hortatives should be short. There are few things that weary one more than being exhorted if the exhortation has no motive power behind. Any kind of a sermon poorly prepared ought to be short. These are usually the longest.

When a preacher, from any cause, has clearly lost the attention of any considerable number of his hearers and cannot regain it, his best plan is to wind up. There is no use in going on if the people will not listen.

LETTER FROM JAPAN.

One of the many encouraging and delightful features of Christian work in this land is the unity of spirit that prevails among all the followers of Christ. The prayer of Christ is being answered here in the manifestation of a oneness of heart, so that even those of different folds mingle together as members of one flock, and followers of the same Shepherd.

As evidence of this, a few days since a social meeting was arranged for all the theological students in Tokyo. It was to be held in a sort of park near the centre of the city, which is a popular place of resort for all classes of people.

A meeting was recently held in Tokyo by the various pastors, in which the question for discussion was, what was the present need in all their respective churches? A weekly meeting for prayer and conference was arranged, and is well attended, as well as exceedingly profitable.

At a recent Gospel meeting held in Tokyo, under the auspices of the Episcopal Mission, the speakers were Bishop Bickersteth, of the English Church, Rev. Dr. Verbeck, of the Reformed Mission in America, Rev. Mr. Honda, of the Methodist Church, and Rev. Mr. Hoshimo, of the Congregational or Independent body. As Bishop Bickersteth was unable to speak in Japanese he was assisted by a Presbyterian interpreter. It is reported that there were 1,000 persons present.

At a similar service recently held in Nagoya, the speakers represented the Protestant and Episcopal Methodists, the Reformed and the Presbyterian Churches.

The general influence of such unity is most beneficial to all, and demonstrates to these heathen minds that there is a secret and strong power in Christianity that binds together all who truly love and try to serve our Lord Jesus Christ.

Much to our astonishment there has recently come a proposition from the former President of the Imperial University to place all schools of the middle grade under the care of the Protestant missionary bodies. The reforms and improvements which have been inaugurated by the Minister of Education (Mr. Mori) have been important and helpful, but the claims on the Government are so many and varied that it is found impossible to do all that is felt to be needed.

In this emergency it is urged that the needed help in the way of suitable preparatory schools would be found in calling in the aid of the missionaries and giving them the charge of this branch of the educational work.

This is, of course, a mere suggestion, but it comes from one who knows of what he speaks, and his opinion will have weight in the minds of those who are to decide such matters. I doubt if such a thing is wholly

feasible even if it should meet with approval on the part of the proper Japanese authorities. It would involve large expense on the part of the missionary bodies, and at present none of them seem to have the surplus funds; even if there was a willingness to devote their income to an almost distinctively educational work.

But the suggestion is an important indication of what has been accomplished by the missionaries in this land in the work of education. Of course no such proposal would have been made had not the work hitherto done attracted the attention and won the admiration or approval of those who were best qualified to judge. Mr. Toyama is not an avowed Christian, and has therefore no religious bias that would lead him to speak contrary to his honest convictions.

It shows, further, the confidence that the leading men in Japan have in the character of the missionaries. It is an acknowledgment of their high character and ability to conduct such a work even better than the Japanese themselves. So we shall see in the future a flocking of the young men of Japan to the Christian schools as the most desirable places to secure a complete and thorough education. There is no question but what the future of Japan depends upon the training which the present generation of scholars receives. Whether it is to be Catholic, Greek, Protestant or Infidel depends upon the influences which surround the youth of to-day.

There is a most blessed work now going on in the various schools in Yokohama and Tokyo especially. At the Ferris Seminary forty-five converts are reported among the girls. It has been a deep and thorough work of God's Spirit. With no extra effort or excitement one after another has come out boldly and joyfully on the Lord's side. On a recent Saturday it is said that more than fifty letters were sent by these new converts to their homes and friends in all parts of the land asking permission to profess their faith in public, and pleading with one and all to repent of their sins and follow the Saviour. No one can tell how much will be accomplished by these earnest and loving appeals.

In the Methodist Protestant school there has also been great interest of late, and on a recent Sabbath forty-five persons received baptism. In the school at Aoyama in Tokyo there are seventy-four applicants for baptism. The students have become so aroused that they have for some time gone out into the streets and preached to the people and distributed tracts.

At another of the mission schools in Tokyo there has been a general awakening and twenty of the scholars asked for prayers at a single meeting.

The churches have also been aroused and are as active as never before. At many of them special services are being held and also morning meetings for prayer. Not only are sinners being converted, but also those who have been visited by their brethren are roused to new zeal and more faithfulness in the discharge of their Christian duties.

At Miyama, in Kishi, there is a rich man who is interested in Christianity, and he recently sent a request for some one to come and preach at his house. An Evangelist from Osaka, with one Church member, went there and held a service at which eighty persons were assembled. These were very attentive, and sought most anxiously to know the way of life. The Evangelist promised to go there and preach to them once a week hereafter, and they were greatly rejoiced.

As I write, the bell has been tolling for a Japanese funeral of an old man who had been very dissolute in his habits and late in life found the Saviour. When the pastor called upon him a few days since, he was unable to speak, but was given a pen and wrote as best he was able: I am at peace, all is bright. I am going to heaven. I shall meet you there. So the Lord is gathering his chosen ones from every land, that people of every clime and tongue may unite in ascriptions of praise to Jesus, who hath washed them from sin and saved them by his own blood, shed upon the cross for their redemption.

A doctor, seventy-one years old, named Miwake, living in the Province of Choshu, had a son who was an active Christian and an elder in the Church at Yamaguchi. The son often tried to persuade his father to become a Christian, but the old man was such a strong believer in Shintoism he did not wish to hear of any other religion.