

## CLERICAL READING.

The importance of good reading in Church can hardly be exaggerated. All admit this, and much has been said and written about it. But if we would accurately define it or determine in what it consists, we should be met with the most conflicting opinions on the subject. To discuss the question within the limits of a short paper would be simply impossible. All that we would attempt is to point out some of the ordinary faults into which clerical readers may fall, and to offer a few suggestions as to the attainment of a higher standard. The facts are these: that as Churchmen we have the most admirably composed, expressive, comprehensive, and Scriptural Liturgy to be found in Christendom, and yet that is seldom rendered in a manner worthy of its excellence and beauty. Sometimes we hear the prayers and lessons hurried over so rapidly and indistinctly that few can follow or enter into their meaning. This may not arise from any want of reverence or devotion in the reader. His mind may move so quickly that he forgets that he is acting as the mouthpiece for others whose thoughts cannot keep pace with his own, while the aged and illiterate are left far behind. A worthy clergyman of the old school used to advise his curates to pause till the oldest member of the congregation had finished his response. This rule would, we fear, be found scarcely practicable in many cases; still the spirit which is embodied is admirable, for the officiating minister should never be unmindful of the mental habits and spiritual capacities of those to whom he ministers.

Then there is the drawing, mouthing, melancholy utterance, which to many worshippers is even more painful, as it leaves much room for the intrusion of wandering thoughts, so difficult to be repressed and so destructive to real devotion. This style of reading also unnecessarily lengthens out our services, and makes them wearisome even to those that would otherwise enjoy them.

Careless, slovenly reading is, of course, highly objectionable. Misplacing or miscalling of words so familiar to all in an age of culture like the present cannot be tolerated, and ought never to occur. Never shall we forget the jar received from a blunder of this kind, which was perpetuated by a voluble Irishman before an educated town congregation, who actually prayed in the Litany for a blessing on 'the lords of the creation and ALL the nobility.' Whether he was a man of extreme democratic proclivities we know not, but he certainly was wanting at the time in the reverence and self-collectedness befitting the House of God, and the absurd slip grated most harshly upon the solemnity of the occasion.

Preaching the prayers aloud is justly objected to by most, and is happily far less common now than it was. The simple consideration that prayer is addressed to God, not to men, if realized would prevent anything like reading for effect. If the clergymen only seek to come to the Throne of Grace in his true character as a humble supplicant, and at the same time as the commissioned minister, whose high privilege it is to express the wants and desires of his fellow-sinners, whether he read or say the prayers, whether he adopt a musical tone, or a monotone, or prefer to speak in the ordinary tones of his voice, he can scarcely fail to be devotional, reverent, and real in his utterance. Then, too, the public reading of the Holy Scriptures is surely a much more important function than it is always considered. In them man is not to be heard, but God speaking through His Word to both reader and hearers. Our Church has, therefore, done well to order in her rubric that he that readeth shall 'so stand and turn himself as he may be best

heard of all such as are present.' Ezra the Scribe's example is one well worthy of imitation, when he and his colleagues 'read in the book of the Law of God distinctly, and gave the sense and caused them to understand the reading.' The judicious, though not excessive, use of emphasis, the natural adaptation of the voice to the character of the passage read, whether it be simple narrative, or the lofty flight of prophetic inspiration, or the calm, sententious reasoning of the Apostles, undoubtedly contribute much to the right understanding of the Divine Oracles, so that the lesson may become the best of sermons.

To do this well is indeed far easier in theory than in practice; yet, if the passage has been carefully studied beforehand, and the reader throw himself into its spirit, he can hardly fail in some measure to convey its meaning to others. And in these days, when so many, especially in rural parishes, are still imperfect scholars, and when the highly educated too often allow other reading to supersede the study of the Bible, the right delivery of the lessons is a means of grace of incalculable value.

The effective preaching of a written sermon is another large question, on which we will not venture further than to remark how many able and earnest men find it far easier to compose a good sermon than to give effect to it when it is composed, and that an inferior discourse well delivered is much more impressive than the most eloquent and powerful homily badly read. All this only serves to illustrate the importance of good reading; but after all the urgent question remains, often anxiously asked and asked in vain, How shall a higher standard be attained? A young clergyman may be very conscious that his reading leaves much to be desired. Home critics are not unfrequently the most frank and outspoken, and it is well when they are so; and yet, unfortunately, they generally fail in suggesting a remedy. They treat the neophyte very much as a drawing-master treated an inexperienced pupil. 'That is not the way to do it,' bluntly said the teacher. 'But how,' inquired the docile pupil, 'am I to do it?' 'That you must find out,' was the cold, unsatisfactory answer. So it is that many can detect faults in others without being able to tell how they are to be overcome.

The fact is that good reading is an art, and, like other arts, it has its method and its rules, though, of course, the perfection of art is to conceal itself; and good reading, especially of sacred themes, must never be artificial. It seems, therefore, most necessary that our clergy should receive special training with this view. Very few would have the courage, if they had the leisure, of one mentioned by the author of the *Harvest of a Quiet Eye* in an admirable paper on 'Expression in Preaching,' contributed to the *Homiletic Magazine*. This worthy man, finding that he had an excellent 'organ,' but did not know how to use it, placed himself under a teacher of elocution. At first the Professor plainly said to him, 'You read very badly.' He was not offended or discouraged, but submitted to a course of lessons, and ended, not indeed by reaching the high excellence which might have been his if he had begun earlier, but considerable improvement. The moral of the tale is evidently this, that candidates for Holy Orders should be put through such a course, and that a certificate of having done so should in every case be required for Ordination. Bishop Howe, in his admirable lectures on Pastoral Work, writes very emphatically to this effect: 'I am sure,' he says, 'enough stress is not laid in our preparation for Holy Orders upon the cultivation of the voice, and upon expressive, not to say intelligible, reading. A good reader will generally be a good preacher. How feebly and insignificantly one sometimes hears a beautiful chapter read! No wonder that the sermon is pointless and dull.' Many a good, zealous young deacon enters on his work acutely sensi-

ble of his defects in this respect. Perhaps he has never read or spoken publicly in his life before, and he has all to learn by experiments, often more distressing to himself than to others. This surely ought not so to be, nor would it be so if proper steps were taken to prepare those whose sacred calling necessitates the constant use of the voice to turn it to the highest account.—*B. W. in Church Bells.*

## A SERVICE OF ANTHEMS AT ST. MARGARET'S, WESTMINSTER.

(Specially Reported.)

On a Thursday lately St. Margaret's Church, Westminster, was crowded to hear a lecture on the foreign composers of Church anthems, illustrated by the members of the choir of the Abbey, under the direction of Dr. Bridges. Organ accompaniments were played by Mr. Winter, deputy organist at the Abbey. Several collects and prayers preceded the lecture. Archdeacon Farrar, who spoke from the lectern, said that last year, aided by a voluntary choir, he had endeavoured to give a short history of the English anthem, illustrated by specimens of the Church music of the greatest of our English composers from the 16th century to the present day, with the object of deepening their interest in the anthem. By the same generous aid they would hear that night specimens of the Church music of some of the great foreign composers. One great line of demarcation divided the composers of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries from those which followed. The former were polyphonic, they wrote for voices alone; whereas the great composers of the eighteenth century composed for instruments alone, or for voices accompanied by instruments. The style existed in Flanders at the latter part of the fourteenth century. That style was represented by two composers, Arcadelt and Palestrina. Of Jacob Arcadelt but little was known, except that he was one of the most prominent of a distinguished band of Netherland musicians, who taught in Italy in the sixteenth century. In 1530 he was master of the boys in St. Peter's at Rome. His works were chiefly madrigals and masses. His style was lofty and natural. He (the Archdeacon) believed that his authorship of the *Ave Maria* associated with his name was uncertain. Giovanni Pier-Luigi da Palestrina was born 1524, and died in 1594. As a boy of thirteen he went to Rome, and, being heard singing in the street, was introduced into a choir, and from that he rose to be chapel master of the Julian Chapel in the Vatican at the age of 27. His earliest masses were dedicated to Pope Julius III., who made him a singer in the Papal chapel. Marcellus succeeded Julius, and Pope Paul IV., who followed dismissed Palestrina, partly because he was married, and partly because his voice was no longer good. He received a small pension, but the disappointment made him seriously ill. But his great triumph was yet to come. Music had fallen into a state of pedantry and the divine and natural was sacrificed to the hard subtleties of science, which utterly dominated over the meaning of the words. It had almost ceased to be religious or suitable to the sacredness of public worship; it was largely founded on secular melodies, sometimes even of a degrading character, of which the evil words were sometimes sung in church by the subordinate singers. So flagrant were these delinquencies that the Pope in his indignation nearly by an edict stopped church music altogether, which would have been disastrous. The great Council of Trent was sitting and the prelates were agreed as to the necessity of some great reform. In 1563 Pope Pius issued a commission of eight cardinals to examine the matter, and Palestrina was commissioned to write a mass as the type of what the solemn office should be. He was so impressed by the importance of the occasion,