

## Concerning Lectionaries.

THERE seems to be little doubt that the custom of reading Holy Scripture in public worship passed over from the Jewish to the Christian Church. The reading of extracts from the Law and the Prophets was the central part of the worship of the synagogue on the Sabbath Day. The Law had originally been read in a triennial course, but by the time of our Lord the five Books ascribed to Moses were gone through once a year. The Lessons from the Prophets were added to those of the Law some time between the days of Ezra and New Testament times, and while for hundreds of years the prophetic readings have been made according to a settled order, it is not by any means certain that such was the case at the beginning of the Christian era. It may, however, be noted that, in the address which S. Paul delivered in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia (Acts xiii. 15), after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, there are manifest references to Deuteronomy i. and Isaiah i., two chapters which are conjoined for the Lessons for one Sabbath in the present Hebrew Lectionary. This has led some scholars to conclude that the practice of reading the Prophets "by course" was in vogue even then. It was only natural, then, that the custom of the synagogue should be continued in the Church.

In the second century, in the homily known as the Second Epistle of Clement (*circa* 120-140 A.D.), there is a reference to the "Books and the Apostles," which probably is to be taken as a rough synonym for the Old and New Testaments. The preacher warns his hearers that, "after the God of truth has been heard," they should give good heed to the things which were written—a statement which refers to the reading of the Word to the congregation. In the Didache there is no direct reference to the reading of the Scriptures, though the words in Chapter XVI., "Gather yourselves together frequently, seeking the things which are profitable unto your souls," may refer to this. About the middle of the second century we have Justin Martyr, who tells us in

his Apology that in the assemblies of the Christians the "Memoirs of the Apostles or the writings of the Prophets" were read as long as time permitted. There is, however, no evidence that there was then anything of the nature of fixed portions of Scripture to be read on particular days (though it is possible that the system which had prevailed among the Jews of reading the Law systematically may have influenced the Christian custom in early times). Tertullian seems to infer that in his day (c. 220) there was complete freedom in choosing the portions of Scripture to be read. In time, however, the practice grew up of making a selection of certain Books or passages for the yearly festivals, such as Easter and Pentecost and their cycles. (It appears probable that some such system of selection had been in use in the synagogue in the early years of its history.) But alongside of this principle of selection there existed what might be called the principle of continuity, and the Church encouraged the ideal of reading through the whole Bible systematically once a year. By the time of S. Augustine (c. 400) these two principles were both in operation. The saint tells us that he was reading and commenting on the Gospel according to S. John when Holy Week and Easter came round, and he had to devote his attention to the passages from the Gospels specially selected as appropriate to that season. He also indicates incidentally, as does S. Chrysostom, that the Acts of the Apostles were publicly read between Easter and Pentecost, while Genesis was read in Lent. S. Ambrose specifies Job as being read in Holy Week, with Jonah on Maundy Thursday.

In the Apostolic Constitutions, which date from the latter half of the fourth century, four Lessons are indicated—two from the Old and two from the New Testament; and it is interesting to note that, while the Reader might read the first three Lessons, the Gospel, which always came last, was read by a Deacon or Presbyter. Cassian, writing in the third decade of the fifth century, mentions that in Egypt it was customary to read two Lessons, one from each Testament, except on Saturdays, Sundays, and the fifty days after Easter, when the first Lesson was taken from Acts or the Epistles, and the second from the Gospels. In time, however, the system of reading through the various Books began to be more and more interrupted by the practice of putting down special Lessons for special days, and as the number of



special days multiplied, it latterly was the case that systematic reading of Scripture ceased almost altogether.

The English Reformers state in the Preface to the First Prayer-Book of King Edward VI. that, in the services of the mediæval church, "this Godly and decent order of the ancient fathers (reading the Bible through once a year) hath been so altered, broken, and neglected . . . that commonly when any Book of the Bible was begun before three or four chapters were read out all the rest were unread. . . . They were only begun, and never read through." To remedy this, the compilers of the Book of Common Prayer drew up a calendar wherein the "reading of holy scripture is so set forth that all things shall be done in order without breaking one piece thereof from another." The Lectionary of the Anglican Reformers followed the civil year, and had no special Sunday Lessons except for Easter, Whitsunday, and Trinity Sundays. Even for those days it did not provide a full set of four readings. There was, for example, no first Lesson given for Evensong on Easter Day. Only in a few cases were special Lessons provided for Holy days, and on fewer still were all four provided. For Good Friday, strangely enough, only the Old Testament Lessons were given. The second Lessons on that day were simply those of the day in the civil year on which that day happened to fall. At the Morning Service the New Testament Lesson was always from the Gospels, the evening Lessons always from the Epistles. A concession to ancient custom was shown in the appointment of Lessons from Isaiah in the closing weeks of the year corresponding roughly to Advent. There were, of course, in addition to the chapters thus provided, the Epistles and Gospels of the Communion Service, and these usually had some reference to the special teaching of the day. No Lessons were taken from the Books of Chronicles or from the Song of Solomon, and only two from the Book of Revelation.

The Lessons of the First Book remained practically unaltered in the Second Prayer-Book of King Edward VI., which, it may be recalled, was that which our Scottish Reformers wished to be used in 1557 on Sundays and other Festival days in the Parish Churches of our land, "with the Lessons of the Old and New Testament conform to the order" of the said Book. These Lessons included some from the Apocrypha, and although attempts have

been made to show that the Reformers did not intend that these should be read, there seems little doubt that during the years the Book was in use in Scotland these were read as part of the Old Testament course. When the Elizabethan Prayer-Book came to be drawn up, some changes were made. Proper first Lessons were provided for all Sundays in the year—none of them from the Apocrypha,—but only for three Sundays were proper second Lessons given. This scheme remained more or less in its entirety until 1871, when a new Lectionary was legalised. This corrected many of the faults which experience had shown in the older work. The new work, for example, shortened many of the Lessons, which in the older one consisted always of one chapter, no matter how long that chapter might be. Alternative first Lessons were provided for Evensong, but only in a few cases were special Lessons provided for Sundays. This Lectionary still holds its place, though in 1922 another was introduced for alternative use. This one provides all four Lessons for every Sunday, and also gives alternative second Lessons for both morning and evening on Sundays. It provides special readings for Festival days, and gives a systematic course for all the days of the year. This Lectionary starts with Advent, and, unlike its predecessors, follows the course of the ecclesiastical, not the civil, year.

In Scotland, since the Reformation (1560), it need hardly be said there has never been any official Lectionary, but from the earliest days of the Reformed Church its standards have laid stress on the orderly reading of Holy Scripture in Public Worship. In the First Book of Discipline it was laid down as a “thing most expedient and necessary” that every church should have a Bible (nothing is said as to what version should be used), and that the people should be commanded to hear the “plain reading or interpretation of the Scriptures as the Church shall appoint, that by frequent reading this gross ignorance, which in the cursed papistry hath overflown all, may partly be removed.” It was thought most expedient that Scripture should be read through in order—“that is, some Book of the Auld and of the New Testament be begun and orderly read to the end.” By this is meant that at every service a portion of both Testaments should be heard by the people, and that such portions should be consecutive. “For this skipping and divagation from one place of the Scripture to another we judge not so



profitable to edify the Church as the continual following of one text." It may be noted that in the later years of the sixteenth century it was the session and not the minister who chose the Books of the Bible which were to be read. In his "Letter of wholesome counsel," addressed to his brethren in Scotland in July 1556, Knox had expressed similar views on the reading of Scripture in the assemblies of the people. "I would in reading the Scripture," he says, "you should join some Books of the Old and some of the New Testament together, as Genesis with one of the Evangelists, Exodus with another, and so on, ever ending such books as ye begin (as the time will suffer). . . . Be frequent in the Prophets and the Epistles of S. Paul."

The Book of Common Order (Knox's Liturgy), as reprinted by Dr Sprott, contains no rubrics relating to the reading of Scripture at all, but Baird in his 'Book of Public Prayer' gives the following as being contained in "early editions": "Upon the days appointed for the preaching of the Word, when a convenient number of the Congregation have come together, that they may make fruit of their presence till the assembly be full, one appointed by the eldership shall read some chapters of the Canonical Books of Scripture, singing Psalms between at his discretion, and this reading to be in order as the books and chapters follow that so from time to time the Holy Scriptures may be read through. But upon special occasions special chapters may be appointed." The writer has been unable to find these words in any edition of the Book of Common Order, but they find a place in the Middleburgh Prayer-Book, which was more or less founded on it. They certainly describe what was the Scots practice, for it was the custom here for the Readers to read Prayers and Chapters, and to lead the singing of the metrical Psalms before the minister came into the church. "These are the three exercises," says Cowper (c. 1615), "which are used in all our congregations every Sabbath one hour before the Preacher come in—first Prayer, then Psalms, the reading of Holy Scripture." With this agrees the description given by Alexander Henderson in his Government and Order of the Church of Scotland (1641). "When so many of all sorts . . . as shall meet together are assembled the Public Worship beginneth with Prayer and reading some portion both of the Old and of the New Testament." Doubtless

the employment of Readers was of great service to the Church in these days, but it seems to have had the unfortunate effect of leading the people to believe that the reading of Scripture was not an important part of worship, seeing it was left to a minor official.

While it was the rule that the Scripture should be read through in order, exceptions were allowed when special circumstances necessitated a change. Thus in the "Order of the Fast," drawn up by Knox and Craig in 1565, there are a series of Lessons given for Morning and Afternoon Services during the week of the Fast. Except at one Service, two or more Psalms are provided, together with a chapter from the Old Testament, the choice of a New Testament Lesson being apparently left to the officiating ministers. This Order was reissued in 1574, and certain chapters were added for use in the time of Pest, Famine, or "when impiety aboundeth." All these chapters are from the Old Testament. Knox's own custom seems to have been to read a chapter from both Testaments daily, "with certain Psalms," says his secretary, Richard Bannatyne, "whilk Psalms he passed through every month once." Now the monthly practice of the reading of the Psalms through every month was one of the "parts of Reformation" brought in by the Anglican Reformers, and although Knox had no good opinion of parts of their Book of Common Prayer, it is quite possible that, as he read the Psalms according to its provisions, he read the Lessons according to its calendar also. In Howat's Form of Prayer, which was drawn up by some moderate Presbyterian ministers about 1616, and which was meant to be used "in all the Parish Churches of Scotland upon the Sabbath day by the Readers where there are any established, and where there are no Readers by the Ministers themselves before they give the sermon," the officiating person is directed to read "a chapter of the Gospel and another of the Epistles as they shall be by course," as well as some of the Psalms. In Cowper's Draft Form of Service, which is probably a little later, there is given a table showing all four Lessons for every day in the year. To some extent this resembles the contemporary English work. It follows the civil year, has no Lessons from Chronicles, and always has the Gospels in the morning and the Epistles at night. It, however, has no special Lessons for Sundays, and it gives eight Lessons from the Book of Revelation. When it was drawn up the Perth



Assembly had appointed the "Five Days"—Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension, and Whitsunday, and in each case except the last (for which there are only two) four Lessons are appointed as well as proper Psalms for each of the days. The Lessons for Christmas are the same as those in the contemporary Anglican Book. That Book had, however, no special second Lessons for Good Friday and Ascension Day, and special Lessons for these days are given in the Scottish work. The Lessons for Easter are quite different from the corresponding English ones, as are also the two Lessons given for Whitsunday.

In the Westminster Directory the second section is devoted to "The Public Reading of the Holy Scriptures," and it is laid down therein that "all the Canonical Books of the Old and New Testaments . . . shall be publicly read . . . out of the best allowed translation." Ordinarily one chapter out of each Testament was to be read at each meeting, the books were to be read over in order, and ordinarily where the reading ended on one day it was to begin the next. The more frequent reading of such Scriptures as the Psalms was commended, and from a little book entitled 'A Supply of Prayer for the ships of the Kingdom,' which was published by authority, and which was simply part of the Directory turned into a Prayer Book, it would appear that it was intended that such should be read in addition to the other Lessons. During the Episcopal régime the practice of reading the Psalms in addition to Chapters seems to have been continued, and the practice went on well into the eighteenth, in some places even to the nineteenth, century. It is often said that reading of Scripture ceased altogether in the Church of Scotland during the eighteenth century, and the words of Professor Gerard, published in 1799, though written some years earlier, show that in some places such was the case. "Reading the Scriptures," he records, "seems to be so necessary and essential a part of Christian worship that the omission of it is the most faulty defect in the present practice of our Church." There were places, however, where different usages prevailed. In Mauchline, in 1788, the Session discontinued a payment of eighteen shillings yearly to the Reader for reading the Scriptures before the service. This did not mean that the reading was to cease, but that the Session Clerk was to do the work for nothing. In other Parishes, both Lowland and Highland, we find the custom of reading while the con-

gregation was assembling. Thus at Dornoch in 1731 the Session agreed to buy a "large Kirk Bible in order to have some person reading in Irish to the congregation before the minister come to church . . . the Reader . . . to be rewarded for so doing." Professor Brunton, who was ordained in 1797, tells us that it was his custom to read a chapter of the Old Testament at the Morning Service, and a chapter of the New at the Afternoon one. We have to remember also that it was the custom to expound the Scriptures systematically then, and that this meant that congregations were made familiar with them even though reading without comment had ceased in places.

In 1856 the Assembly enjoined its ministers to read a chapter from each Testament at each diet of worship, but it was not always obeyed. In 1858 a book, 'Presbyterian Liturgies,' was published in Edinburgh by a minister of the Church of Scotland. It only provides for one Lesson in each service. Three years later there was published what may be considered the first (if not indeed the only) Lectionary issued under the auspices of the Church of Scotland. In 'Prayers for Social and Family Worship,' which was prepared by the Committee on Aids to Devotion, there is given a "Table of Portions of Holy Scripture." This Table provides four Lessons for every Sunday in the civil year, and in addition there is a "Table of Psalms," in which a large number of the Psalms are classified under various headings, such as "Prayers," "Thanksgiving," &c. A list of "Select Portions of Scripture" is also given, providing passages for use by Sailors, Soldiers, and Colonists, as well as passages for use by or for the Sick or at the Burial of the Dead. The Table and the Select Portions appeared in all subsequent editions of the book, and the former is printed in the 'Prayers for Divine Service,' published by authority of the General Assembly in 1923, and so may be considered to be an official Lectionary for the Church. In the last-mentioned work there are, in addition to the Table, Lessons given for all the "five days" on which special services were appointed by the Perth Assembly, as well as for the New Year, Harvest Thanksgiving, &c. This Table resembles the early Anglican Lectionary in providing only extracts from the Gospels for morning and from other New Testament Books in the evening. It was not compiled by the Committee who drew up the book, but was taken by



them from Baird's 'Book of Public Prayer,' published at New York in 1857.

The first edition of *Euchologion* was published in 1867, and it contained two Lectionaries, one of which was the one which had been published in 'Prayers for Social and Family Worship.' The other gave a course of reading for two years, and they were prefaced by an interesting chapter on "The use of Holy Scripture in the Service of God." Here it was claimed that this "biennial table, while securing the advantages of a calendar, obviates in a considerable degree, and probably as far as will be found possible, the objection made, not without reason, to the tables in use in most churches, that they present only a small portion, varying little or nothing from year to year, of the whole Scripture for public reading."

So far as the writer has been able to discover, this is the first instance of a Lectionary for more than one year being found in any Book of Prayers in the English language. There is no doubt that the claim made by the compilers was amply justified, for the Table included the whole of the Gospels as well as the greater part of the other books of the New Testament. The Books of the Old Testament were read through in order, those from Genesis to Job being placed according to the arrangement of the English Bible, and the Prophets being arranged more or less chronologically; Proverbs and Ecclesiastes were inserted at various places among the Prophetical writings. The Lectionary was, however, subject to the old objection that the evening worshippers never heard the Books of Moses and the Gospels, while the morning worshippers were in the same position with regard to the Prophets and Epistles. These two Lectionaries still hold their place in the Book of Common Order, though the latter one has been somewhat altered. These alterations were made in the fifth edition, when a Table of Daily Lessons was also added. In the first edition special Lessons were given for the great days of the Christian year. These "days" were not, however, given their usual names—Christmas, Good Friday, &c.,—but were termed Commemoration of Christ's Nativity, Crucifixion, &c.

Other Lectionaries which may be mentioned are the two "Courses of Readings" in the Directory of the Presbyterian Church of England. One of these gives a three years' course, Genesis being read in the first year from

January to September ! The two years' course is that of Euchologion. In 'Presbyterian Forms of Service' (a United Presbyterian work) there is a two years' course, with a pretty full list of Lessons for special occasions. In the 'Directory and Forms for Public Worship' (a United Free Church book) there are four lists of Scripture Lessons given, two of the lists consisting of passages from the Old and two from the New Testament. Each consists of fifty-two portions, one for each Sunday in the year, the order in which they are to be used being left to the individual ministers. This is probably the best method to be employed with any Lectionary which is based on the civil year, and allows a change-over from Gospels to Epistles or from Hexateuch to Prophet as often as may be thought necessary. Now that ministers of the great majority of churches observe the greater festivals, such as Christmas, Easter, Ascension, Whitsunday, it would seem that the best course in framing a Lectionary would be to base it quite definitely on the ecclesiastical year. This would mean that the seasons of Advent, Lent, Eastertide would all receive recognition, as would also such days as Palm Sunday, Rogation Sunday, &c.

In the Presbyterian Book of Common Prayer, which was published in 1864 by Professor C. W. Shiels of Princeton, and which represents an emendation of the Church of England Prayer-Book in accordance with the wishes of the Presbyterian divines of the seventeenth century, there is given a Lectionary which follows the Christian year, and which is said in the notes to be from the Church of Scotland. It is really the Lectionary in 'Prayers for Social and Family Worship' adapted to "meet the day." This is probably as good as could be compiled, so far as a one year's course is concerned, but it is not possible to cover much ground in that space of time. The new Lectionary of the Scottish Episcopal Church provides Sunday Lessons for a three years' course, as well as daily Lessons for a year and special Lessons for a number of Saints' days, &c. As can be easily seen, such a Lectionary covers a very great amount of Scripture, there being about five hundred passages given for the Sunday Lessons alone. The one objection to it from the Church of Scotland standpoint is that often the Gospel or Epistle for the day would make a better Lesson. These, of course, are different from the portions given.

The arguments for and against the use of a Lectionary



hardly come within the scope of this paper, but, generally speaking, it may be said that those who object do so on the ground that the use of such is likely to spoil the unity of the service. In their view the service should revolve round the sermon, and the Lessons should be made to depend upon that. This practice is held by some to be in accordance with our Lord's action in the synagogue, where He chose the Prophetic reading to suit His discourse. Another argument against the Lectionary is that some portions of the Bible are bound to be omitted, and ministers have been known to state that the subjects to be found in the omitted chapters are more instructive than some found in those retained. On the other hand, it has been urged that by the use of a Table of Lessons the people are made acquainted with the whole body of Scripture without which they cannot be well-informed Christians ; that from the minister's standpoint it is easier to find a text in a Lesson than a Lesson to suit a text, and that it gives him greater freedom in preaching on certain subjects which are apt to be overlooked. It is also more in accordance with the rule of the Church than the practice of "skipping from place to place," which those who make the Lessons depend on the sermon too often follow. There is something to be said on both sides, but whatever method be followed care should always be taken that in the selection of the Scripture Lessons no vital truth or fact should be unrepresented, and that the needs of the congregation should not be sacrificed for the sake of a system or for the want of one.

WM. M'MILLAN.