

Cremation Services

IN our populous regions most funerals nowadays are cremations. Services in Crematorium Chapels have to be brief. The importance of their content is the greater, because the average congregation contains people whose Christian faith is vague and hazy, if existent at all.

The chances are, however, that some of these, faced by the mystery of death, are emotionally concerned, and looking for comfort. They are solemnised and susceptible to suggestion.

What shall the minister speak in prayer? B.C.O. contains admirable models, abbreviation being called for. Particularisation in regard to the individual deceased calls for discretion. In this connection an "aside" from the lips of Professor James Cooper (*Eccles. Hist.*, Glas., 1898-1922) is memorable. It was long before Chairs of Pastoral Theology. He was the only professor in the Divinity Faculty who gave any guidance to students concerning the conduct of Divine Service. In course of counselling the members of his class on funeral prayers he remarked: "The other day in the Bute Hall, at the Memorial Service to my ear caught something familiar about Professor 's prayer. Then I realised that he was transmitting to Almighty God an extract from the Minutes of the University Court on the subject of the deceased."

This reminds me of an occasion when an esteemed parishioner and I together attended a funeral in "another" Church. As we came away my friend said to me: "When you come to conduct my funeral I beg of you not to constitute yourself Council for the Defence before the Throne of Grace." Within a fortnight I duly obtempered his injunction.

It is the Readings, however, which ought obviously to provide the basis of the prayers. How many in the congregation are asking, "If a man die, shall he live again?" The Readings ought to provide the answer.

B.C.O. lectionary is bewilderingly voluminous. The creature's reverential awe in face of the Creator, and the importance of that Creator's spoken Word can be expressed in a sentence or two from the Old Testament.

There being no clear expression of the hope of immortality in the O.T. makes it the more essential that words from Wisdom, III. be read, as a prelude to the New Testament.

Whatever else in addition be chosen from the Apostolic writings, I. Cor. XV, 35-38, 42-44 ought never to be omitted.

The virtue of that passage is that it makes "I believe in the resurrection of the body" meaningful in terms of modern thought ; and it lifts the bereaved heart into a blessed sphere of timelessness, where it is not troubled by the nagging question, "at what stage of life shall I meet my beloved again ?"

The readings naturally end with words from the Master's own lips.

Suggested Scripture Readings for a Funeral Service.

Introductory : Isaiah 40 (4b-7).

(Let us therefore read in this Word of God passages for our admonition and comfort. First from the Old Testament).

Ps. 18, selected verses :

The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer ; my strength in whom I will trust.

The sorrows of death compassed me. In my distress I called upon the Lord. He heard my voice. The Lord my God will enlighten my darkness.

Ps. 16 (10-11a) ("The grave" in place of "hell").
Ps. 23(4). Wisdom 3 (1-4).

From the writings of the Apostles : I Thess. 4 (13,14).
II Cor. 5 (1). I Cor. 15 (35-38, 42-44).

Words of our Lord Himself : S. John 14 (1, 2, 27).
S. Matt. 5 (4).

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