

The Church Worship Association of the United Free Church.

THE movement towards reform in the public worship of Scottish Presbyterianism, which began with the formation of the Church Service Society in 1865, was bound in time to affect other branches of the Church than the one to which that Society, unofficially, belonged. It was in the nature of things that the first stirring of interest should appear in the United Presbyterian Church. That Church had led the way in the introduction of hymns into public worship. So early as 1798, one of its component sections, the Relief Church, brought into use a collection of 231 'Sacred Songs and Hymns,' and the fusion of the Relief and Secession Churches in 1847 led immediately to the preparation of the first hymn-book of the United Presbyterian Church, published in 1851, over twenty years before the Free Church was ready to venture on similar action. In the matter of public worship, therefore, the United Presbyterian Church was less bound by tradition than the sister Church with which it was to unite in 1900.

It was not, however, till 1882 that during the meetings of the United Presbyterian Synod, the supreme Court of that Church, the first meeting was held of "ministers interested in the improvement of the Devotional Services of the Church." To some extent the way had been prepared by a deliverance of the Synod itself, recommending the subject of the conduct of public worship to the careful attention of ministers; but even so the first gathering was small. Dr James Brown of Paisley, author of that charming book 'The Life of a Scottish Probationer,' presided, and the duties of Secretary were assigned to the Rev. William Dickie of Perth, now Dr Dickie of Dowanhill. With him, five others of those present at the first meeting are with us still.

To begin with, the proceedings were restricted to conferences at which papers were read on such subjects as "The Worship of the Church in Early Reformation Times," and "The Defects in the Presbyterian Service," but in May 1883 those engaged in these preliminary educative activities felt ready to take more decisive action, and the 'Devotional Service Association in con-

nection with the United Presbyterian Church ' was formed, with Professor Calderwood as Honorary President, Mr Andrew Henderson of Paisley (afterwards LL.D.) as President, Mr Dickie as Secretary, and Mr Charles Jerdan of Greenock (afterwards D.D. and Principal Clerk of the United Free Church General Assembly) as Editor.

For some years useful preparatory work occupied the leaders of the Association, on experimental Orders and Forms of Service, which were issued as Occasional Papers. In 1890, however, it was decided that a book of such Forms "was needed and would be welcomed," and in the following year the first edition of 'Presbyterian Forms of Service' appeared. The modest issue of 400 copies was sold out in a few weeks, in spite of the fact that the book was viewed with such official disfavour that the Church's Publications Committee refused to allow it to be sold on the Synod's premises. A second edition was published in 1892, and a third, enlarged and much revised, in 1894. By many competent judges this is regarded as one of the best books of its kind issued in Scotland. Considerable parts of it were translated into Efik and Kaffir for the use of native pastors in Calabar and Kaffraria.

Meantime the Free Church was also taking action. In May 1891, at a conference of ministers and elders, a "Public Worship Association" was formed, its object being "to promote the ends of edification, order, and reverence in the public services of the Church, in accordance with Scripture principles, and in the light especially of the experience and practice of the Reformed Churches holding the Presbyterian system." The leaders were men of distinction and influence, as, for example, Drs D. D. Bannerman, Blaikie, A. B. Bruce, A. Orrock Johnston, Laidlaw, Hugh Macmillan, Reith, Ross Taylor, S. D. F. Salmond, Walter C. Smith, and George Steven; the last-named alone of these survives.

From the first this Association set before it the likelihood of a union of the Free Church with "one or both of the other great branches of Presbyterianism in Scotland, which in our opinion," the writers said, "is much to be desired," and its work was deliberately shaped with this in view. A consequence of reunion, it was believed, would be a revision by the united Church of the old Scottish Book of Common Order and of the Westminster Directory for Worship, and the work of the Association was intended to give its members such preparation that "our Church

should be in a position to take an intelligent and influential part in the ultimate readjustment and improvement of the common standards for worship."

Papers were issued annually for private circulation among the members, and in 1898 there was published 'A New Directory for the Public Worship of God.' It was an attempt to follow the examples of both of the old Scottish standards. Specimen forms were given for certain parts of the ordinary services, and fuller forms for special occasions, but the main part of the book was devoted to materials and suggestions "which, while not repressing or hampering free prayer, should serve to guide and stimulate it." This book was of great value, and remains still a useful magazine from which those who conduct public worship may profitably draw. Many regret that it has never been republished.

For some years before this book appeared this Association had been drawing towards the sister Society of the United Presbyterian Church. The Minutes of the latter record that in 1892 "the Rev. Mr Harvey of Lady Glenorchy's" (now one of the Principal Clerks of the General Assembly) appeared at its annual meeting as the first ambassador of the younger Association, and in 1895 co-operation was instituted in the preparation of a book of Services for Children, which, however, did not appear until after union had taken place.

The union of the two Churches in October 1900 led at once to the amalgamation of the two Devotional Associations under the name of the Church Worship Association. Unfortunately the Minutes of the new body between 1900 and 1914 have disappeared, and the gap can be bridged only by enumerating some of the publications issued during that time: the 'Services for Children' (1901), already referred to; an excellent 'Anthology of Prayers for Public Worship' (1907); 'Directory and Forms for Public Worship' (1909), in which an effort was made to combine the methods of devotional aid used in its predecessors on the two sides of the united Church; 'Forms of Prayer for Use in War Time' (1914); and 'Prayers for the Christian Home' (first edition, prepared by the Free Church Association, 1901; revised edition, 1919).

In 1923 the impending exhaustion of the supplies of the 'Directory and Forms' raised the question whether a revision of that book should be undertaken. The present writer urged that the time had now arrived when it might

safely be taken for granted that the educative work which the Association and its constituent societies had set themselves to prosecute had sufficiently accomplished its purpose, and that the General Assembly should be approached with a request that it should authorise the preparation of an official 'Book of Common Order.' Having persuaded the Association to take this view, he was himself charged with the task of presenting the case to the Assembly. A number of Overtures were sent up, and these were spoken to by the Rev. R. M. Adamson of Ardrossan, now President of the Association; then the motion of approval was submitted. The anticipation that the mood of the Assembly would be found to be favourable was justified. Some natural hesitation was expressed, chiefly by elders unfamiliar with the history of the Church in connection with this matter, but the motion was unanimously accepted, and at no subsequent stage was the unanimity broken. A Committee was appointed, and in due time the finished book—the 'Book of Common Order, 1928'—was submitted to the Assembly and authorised as the official manual of public worship for the Church.

Apart from the merits or demerits of this book, those who led the movement of which it was the issue accomplished two good things: they reconciled their side of the Church to the Reformation practice of having an authorised book of guidance for the Church's worship; and they prepared the way, on the same side, for the great advance of having set up from the first in the united Church a Standing Committee of the Assembly charged with the oversight of the vital interest of Public Worship and Aids to Devotion.

This goal having been reached, some have thought that the Church Worship Association has reached the term of its usefulness and should now be dissolved. Though latterly inactive, however, it has been kept in existence with a view to union with the Church Service Society, in the belief that there still remain fields of usefulness in which a Society of this independent kind can do good work, upon which an Assembly Committee, acting under necessary restrictions, could not find it expedient to venture. This union is now happily about to be accomplished, and the present number of the Annual already gives an illustration of the good work which the new Church Service Society may be expected to do.

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