

Notes and Comments.

THE value of guidance and order on great ceremonial occasions was never better illustrated than in the proceedings of the Union Assembly in October last. On such an occasion it was of the first importance that the words spoken should be carefully chosen, and that all things should be done decently and in order. The forms drawn up by a Joint-Committee of what were then the two Churches comprised an order for the opening service in St Giles', for the proceedings in the Hall of Assembly, for the Communion Service on the following day, and for the commemoration of the event in all the churches throughout the land. It may safely be said that no small part of the impressiveness which characterised all these opening celebrations was due to the quiet and careful labours of the men who framed these services.

It is gratifying to know that the Union of the Scottish Churches is to be followed by a union of their two Societies of kindred aims, which have existed side by side for the better ordering of public worship. Several of the best articles in this issue of the 'Annual' are by former members of the United Free Church, the Public Worship Association of which is described by Dr Millar Patrick on pp. 79-82 of this volume. A Conference of the Executive of both Societies has been held for the purpose of adjusting matters of detail, and there is every hope that the union may be an accomplished fact before, or soon after, this Annual is issued.

Two of the most solemn moments in the life of a young man must surely be these—his receiving Licence to preach the Gospel, and his Ordination to the Holy Ministry. Yet it has often happened that the services and surroundings on such occasions leave much to be desired in the way of order and seemliness. One has seen students licensed in all sorts of places; the writer of this note was licensed in a hotel! Where possible, the service should be held in a church, and at least the friends of the probationer should have an opportunity of being present. A suggested order of service for the licensing of probationers has been drawn up by the Assembly's Committee on Public Worship, and a copy has been sent to every Presbytery Clerk. Even where this order is not followed in every detail, it will serve as a useful guide in the choice of materials for use at such services.

The same Committee has undertaken an even more important task in drawing up an order for Ordination services. Unlike Licence, Ordination is practically always conferred in Church; but the circumstances are often such as tend to its being conducted in a somewhat haphazard fashion. The Charge may have been vacant for some months, and there may be no one on the spot with sufficient authority to see that matters are carefully arranged beforehand. The ordinand may not even have been told where he is to stand, nor the members of Presbytery where they are to sit. In all such matters, and in the conduct of the service itself, Presbytery Clerks and others responsible will find excellent guidance in the manual recently published.

"Let the minister," says the 'Directory,' "dismiss the congregation with a solemn Blessing." This act, though only a few seconds in duration, is, when duly and reverently performed, one of the most solemn and significant parts of Divine Service. "Think well," says the late Dr James Robertson in one of his Pastoral Theology lectures, "what it is to bless in the name of the Lord; what a grand thing this is if done in faith by the man who utters the words, his heart taking hold on God's great goodness and faithfulness as he speaks them, and if responded to with a true *Amen* in the souls of his fellow-worshippers." We have guidance here from the New Testament even as to the gesture which should accompany the act: "He lifted up His hands, and blessed them." A practice has arisen in some quarters of using the pronoun 'us' instead of 'you' in the act of Blessing. Surely this robs the act of its significance. One cannot imagine, for example, a father blessing his son in this way; a Benediction is more than a prayer, and the pronoun should be in the second person, not the first. Again, one sometimes hears an ascription of glory—"Now unto Him," &c., in place of the Benediction. But this, again, is surely wrong. An ascription is good in its proper place—at the close of sermon, or lesson, or song of praise. But it is no substitute for the 'solemn Blessing.'

To those congregations which have adopted the Revised Church Hymnary, the recently published Scottish Psalter is practically indispensable, were it only for the reason that the tunes common to both books have in almost every instance been identically harmonised. It scarcely needs to be pointed out that it is difficult, even were it desirable, for a choir to get into the way of singing the same tune well if harmonised in two different ways. Other advantages in the metrical part of the book are the reference table given to the more 'singable' metrical versions, and the tunes recommended for each. The only criticism we feel inclined to offer is to express regret that the name of the tune recommended is not placed (as in former editions) at the head of each psalm.

The 'prose' portion of the book (the two bound together make a compact and handy volume to hold) has been carefully pointed according to the modern method which secures that the chanting shall follow, so far as possible, the natural sense and rhythm of the words. To those accustomed to the kind of chanting which prevailed (at least till lately) in most Anglican churches, the slower pace and altered accentuation will at first be unfamiliar. It is safe to say, however, that even a little experience will demonstrate the superiority of the newer method. Fuller reference to the subject will be found in Mr W. M. Page's able article on p. 57 of the 'Annual.'

Mention of the Psalter suggests another reflection—that the Paraphrases scarcely hold the place they did in the service of the sanctuary, and that this is matter for regret. Granted that some of them are too quaint in style and diction to be suitable for use in public worship, many have a beauty and dignity unequalled by any modern hymn. In particular, the paraphrases are rich in allusions to the great events of the Church's year. The spirit of Advent finds expression in the 23rd, and notably in the 39th, "Hark the glad sound, the Saviour comes!" For Christmas we have the 19th, "The race that long in darkness pined"; and the 37th, "While humble shepherds watched their flocks." The *Magnificat* and the *Nunc Dimittis* are versified respectively in the 36th and 38th, and our Lord's Manifestation to the Gentiles finds an echo in the 18th, "The beam that shines from Zion hill shall lighten every land." For the penitential season we have the 28th, "Attend and mark the solemn fast"; and the 30th, "Come let us to the Lord our God." The sufferings of our Lord are alluded to in the 25th, "Rejected and despised of men"; in the 41st, "For God gave up His Son to death"; and in the 44th, "Tis finished—was His latest voice." Easter joy is reflected in the 48th, "The Saviour died, but rose again"; while the 61st, "Blest be the everlasting God," speaks of our Lord's Ascension; and the 58th, "Where high the heavenly temple stands," of His Priestly Intercession. Pentecost is foretold in the 43rd, "That heavenly Teacher, sent from God"; while the work of the Spirit is further described in the 56th, "His Spirit, through the Saviour shed." And on Trinity Sunday we could find no better song of adoration than the 60th—addressed to the Father of peace, extolling the Risen Saviour, and praying that the Spirit may 'seal our souls.'