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Why Men Do Not Attend Church

PERMIT me to give some reasons, in my opinion, why men do not come to church, and suggest some means by which they may be induced to attend.

1. On entering a church men find the pews are mostly appropriated by people of social influence and standing in the parish, who in some instances seldom attend, with the result that others, less fortunately situated, have to put up with the annoyance and inconvenience of being kept waiting until the service has actually begun, or is on the point of doing so, before they can be shown into a seat.

2. Excessive ritual is an objection; also the singing of the canticles by the choir to an elaborate and difficult setting instead of a common chant, precludes the congregation from joining, with the result that they have simply to stand up patiently and wait until it is all over. As I heard a man once remark, "It makes one feel as if you are not wanted."

3. The sermon is often "dry" and uninteresting, nevertheless there is no option but to sit it out; and during its delivery, the sun, maybe, is streaming gloriously in at the windows, and men who have been shut up in dingy offices or shops all the week naturally wish they were "outside," enjoying the fresh air, &c. The inevitable result is that the next fine Sunday they stay at home, or go for a walk, and gradually end up by not coming to church at all. Whilst it is easy to find fault, it is more difficult to suggest a remedy, nevertheless, may I venture to propose how some of these defects might be remedied.

Taking the objections in the order stated, I am of opinion—

1. That all churches should be absolutely free, and everyone at liberty to sit where they like—first come first served. In churches where it is not possible to adopt this principle, let the regular seatholders be given to understand that if they are not in their places when the bell ceases tolling, their seats will be filled up by others who may be in waiting. It is not too much to expect that those who have pews allotted to them should thus show some consideration for the convenience and comfort of their less fortunate neighbours.

2. Let the musical portion of the service be "congregational," so that everyone can join. It is the duty of the choir to lead the singing, not to monopolise it. On the other hand, if canticles, with an elaborate setting, are considered desirable, let copies of the same be put in each pew (with hymn books and prayer books as well), when all will doubtless do their best to join in the singing, as most people have a sufficient knowledge of music to enable them do so. The expense in carrying out this suggestion could easily be met by a special collection. The question of ritual is a sore subject with some people, and whilst it is hopeless to expect to please everybody, it is as well to remember that an excess of ritual, or the utter absence of it, will neither get men into heaven or keep them out of it. Then as to the administration of the Holy Sacrament, some like to attend the

early, some the mid-day, and others the evening celebration. Doubtless, all have their particular reasons, and the clergy will do well to humour them, following the ambition of St. Paul, "To be all things to all men."

3. The sermon. No one doubts that "intelligent men" occupy the pulpit, neither, I imagine, do the vast majority of "intelligent men" wish the clergy to discourse on "the relationship of capital to labour," or "the cash versus the credit system"—let the cobbler stick to his last. The great defect in sermons, in my humble opinion—and I say it with all respect—is that the clergy are "always harping on one string." By this, I mean that the text, and the discourse which is founded on it, is almost invariably taken from the New Testament, and the sole object seems to be to impress on men some moral or spiritual lesson. Let me not be misunderstood. I admit to the full, and gratefully acknowledge, the admonition, comfort, and warning which I, in common with the rest of my fellow men, have derived from such sermons; but surely the Old Testament prophecies have some bearing on the great events of the day, at home and abroad, which are exercising men's minds so much at the present time? At the risk of being accused of having an ulterior object in view, let me answer my own interrogation.

Reflecting men of all shades of opinion are constantly associating the English people with Bible prophecy in relation to Israel; the clergy often speak as though the nation was a spiritual Israel, fulfilling literally the promises made only to God's peculiar people. Assuming this contention to be correct, what a flood of light is thrown on the Old Testament prophecies and their relation to present events, as recorded or foreshadowed in the daily papers. Topics, remember, not of a controversial or party character. In enumerating some, I will add the Scriptural references for the sake of clearness, and without comment, in order to be brief.

Imperial federation, Genesis xxxv. 11, xlviii. 19. The growing influence of Russia over the Asiatic Turkoman hordes, Persia, and Abyssinia, Ezekiel xxxviii. 5. When and where we may expect to be at war with Russia; who will be our allies; and the sore straits we shall be reduced to before that Power is vanquished and destroyed; Ezekiel xxxviii. 8-23, xxxix. 1-16.

Why our present "policy of isolation" will keep us from being involved in the coming European war, Isaiah xxvi. 20.

Why the jealousy and ill feeling exhibited by France, &c., in endeavouring to "stir up strife" against us will be brought to nought, Isaiah liv. 15-17.

Why we may expect never to be molested in these islands, 2 Samuel vii. 10, 11.

Why we shall always be reigned over by a Monarchy, and never have a Republic, 2 Samuel vii. 12-17, Jeremiah xxxiii. 25, 26, Genesis xlix. 10.

Why the Jews look to this country alone for help, and will ultimately come here to a great extent before being taken back in our ships to Palestine, Deut. xxxiii. 7, Jeremiah iii. 18, Isaiah xxvii. 7.

Why it is our special duty to act as the missionary people of the earth, Matthew xxiv. 43, Isaiah xxvii. 6, Matthew xxviii. 19, 20, Isaiah xliii. 10; and so on, *ad infinitum*.

The clergy may object that the answer to these questions involves the admission that we are Israel, and “that that is a fact we do not admit.” Granted. Then let me ask them what interpretation they place upon the terms, expressions, and sentiments put into our mouths by the National Church? If the prayers contained in the Book of Common Prayer mean anything, they must be taken in a literal sense, and in a literal sense the witness of our great National Church is that we are Israel. As “intelligent men” let the clergy, therefore, realise this connection between cause and effect, and show, by occasional pulpit reference, that the predictions in the Bible are being testified to as to their fulfilment by the contents of the daily newspapers, and that “intelligent men” have, in the language of Scripture, “the work of prophecy more sure, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a lamp shining in a dark place.”

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