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# THE HOMILETIC REVIEW

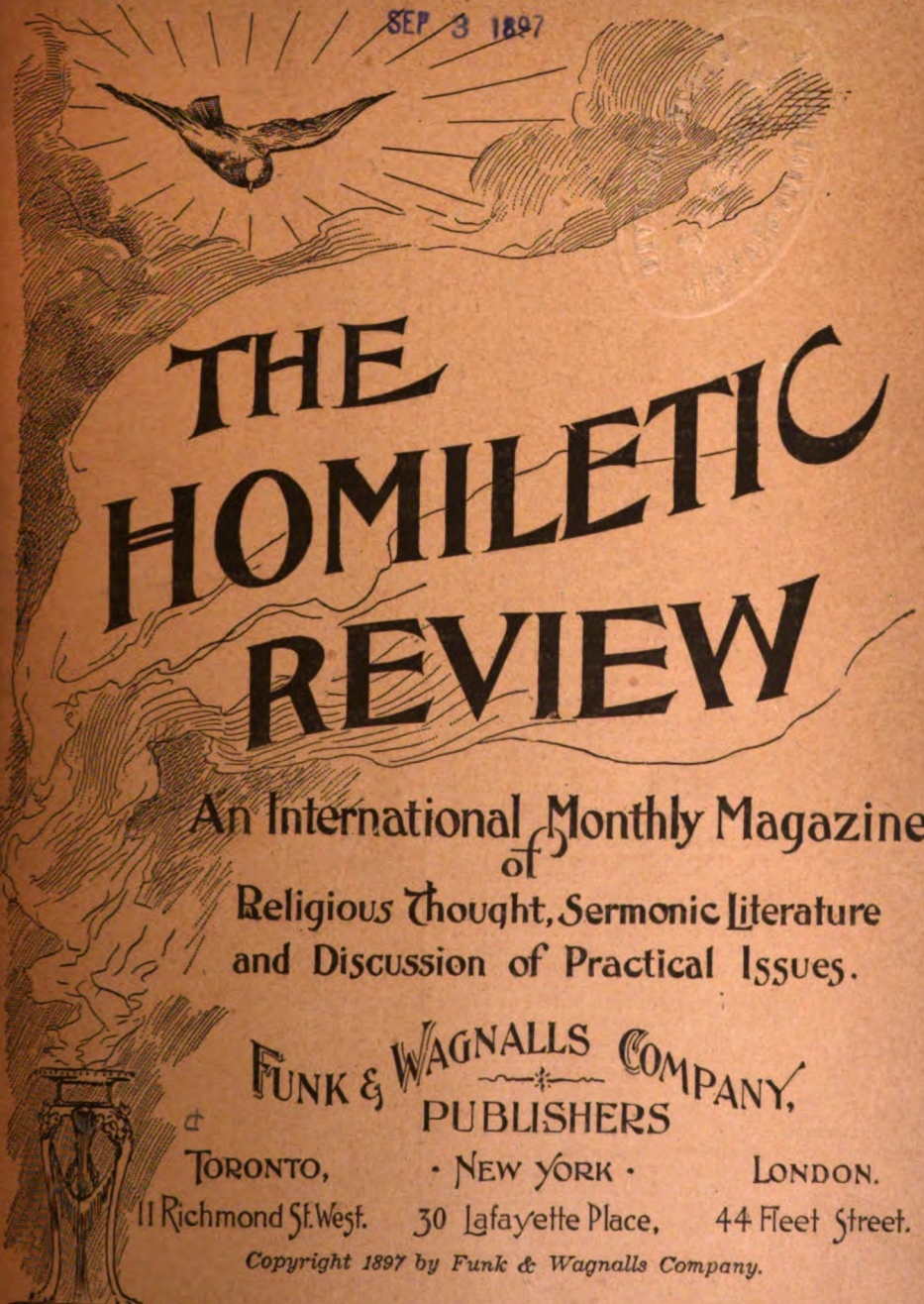
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# THE HOMILETIC REVIEW.

Vol. XXXIV.—AUGUST, 1897.—No. 2.

## REVIEW SECTION.

### I.—HOW THE NON-CHURCHGOING MASSES ARE TO BE REACHT IN ORDER TO GIVE THEM THE GOSPEL.

BY PROFESSOR T. D. WITHERSPOON, D.D., LL.D., PRESBYTERIAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, LOUISVILLE, KY.

THE statistics of church-attendance in this country are, to one confronted with them for the first time, simply appalling. We speak of ours as a Christian country. We congratulate ourselves upon the extent to which the religion of the cross pervades all ranks and classes of society. Yet the statistics of church-accommodation go to show that if on any Sabbath morning every person of suitable age should determine to attend public worship, not more than one fourth could be comfortably accommodated, even tho every sanctuary were crowded to its full capacity.

It is manifest, therefore, that if the non-churchgoing masses are to be reacht by the Gospel, additional provision of some kind must be made for their benefit. One who looks no further than to the lack of sufficient church-accommodation will doubtless find his zeal in the interest of church-erection suddenly kindled, and will be ready to inaugurate a great movement for the multiplication of houses of worship. But his ardor will meet with a sudden and fatal chill when he comes to look into the statistics of attendance upon the churches we already have. Insufficient as church-accommodation is for those who ought to attend upon public worship, it will be found that on ordinary occasions it is nearly, if not fully, double what is actually required, so that what is needed, at present at least, is not more church-accommodation.

Inaccessibility, or at least inconvenience of location in the churches, is sometimes pleaded as a reason for the scant attendance upon public worship. The remedy proposed is to move our churches to points

NOTE.—This periodical adopts the Orthography of the following Rule, recommended by the joint action of the American Philological Association and the Philological Society of England:—Change d or ed final to t when so pronounced, except when the e affects a preceding sound.—PUBLISHERS.

more convenient to the masses. Unfortunately, in this case, as in the preceding one, the facts are against us. Go on any Sabbath morning into one of our half-filled churches; ascertain the place of residence of each worshiper. You will find that a majority have walked a number of blocks, or ridden a number of miles on the street cars. Estimate the average distance that the worshipers have come; with that as a radius, and the church building as a center, strike a circle, and you will find within it people enough who never go regularly to any church to fill your building twice over. Then take your stand at the front door of this out-of-the-way church, as you deem it; look at the throngs of people sweeping along the sidewalks and filling the street cars on their way to public parks, and other places of Sunday entertainment. They have walked or ridden two or three times as far as would be necessary to take them to a church of any denomination they may prefer. It is evident that much that is said about the inconvenient location of our churches is simply bosh. If people wish to go to church, a few blocks' difference in distance counts for nothing. When they are on the street in their Sunday clothes, they rather prefer a walk of half a mile, or a ride on the cars of two or three.

Nor will the panacea for non-churchgoing be found, as some vainly imagine, in making our churches less imposing in architecture and less costly and sumptuous in adornment. All this extravagance is to be decried because of its effect upon the churchgoer, but not out of regard to the non-churchgoer. In point of fact, the people whose presence we miss in our churches are not kept away by splendid architecture, luxurious cushions, and electric lights. If so, what shall we say of the course pursued by the merchants who bid for their trade, and the theater-managers who cater to their amusement? If these children of this world, who are in their generation wiser than the children of light, found that the masses refused to enter their palatial business houses, their splendid opera-houses, and their sumptuously furnished and brilliantly lighted cafés, they would soon dispense with them. And yet, in point of fact, every year witnesses increase expenditure and additional extravagance in these very things which are supposed to keep the masses from our churches. It is idle to attribute to the elegance and sumptuousness of our churches the absence of a class of people who, the poor and homely of dress, press in during the week into these business palaces and places of elegant resort.

Recognizing the fact, as apparent as it is deplorable, that large classes of the people stand aloof from our churches, and are not attracted by our regular services, it has been proposed to change the character of the services, and make them attractive to the masses. And so we have the great whoop and hurrah, with orchestras and prima donnas, and sensational sermons, and pulpit harlequinade. Alas, the game is not worth the candle! We can not rob God's children of their bread to throw flowers and perfumes over mere world-

lings. We can not turn the house of God into a Sunday-night opera-hall.

In despair of attracting the non-churchgoers to our sanctuaries of worship, various expedients have been suggested and carried into effect for taking the Gospel to people who will not come to the church to receive it.

There is, for instance, the plan of mission chapels, and down-town churches, provided especially for those in the humbler walks of life. But, apart from the unscripturalness of the principle upon which this movement proceeds,—that of having one place of worship for the rich and another for the poor,—there is always the further difficulty that, from the limited means at command, the building is homely, the congregation small, the preacher mediocre, the service uninspiring, and just where there is most need of special attraction it is most signally wanting.

To remedy this, a second and much wiser expedient has been suggested, and is now in successful operation in London under the direction of Rev. Hugh Price; in New York, Philadelphia, and other large cities under the supervision of Mr. Moody. The method pursued by these men is to rent large and attractive public halls, and to secure the ablest and most popular pulpit speakers with the very best possible service of song.

As a temporary expedient, and as a means to an end, this use of public halls is greatly to be commended. It is, however, like all expedients of this kind, if viewed as a permanent institution, open to the fatal objection that it recognizes, and seems to sanction, the division of the community into two classes, one of which is expected to worship in churches and the other in public halls. The church edifice, erected solely for the worship of God, and solemnly set apart to His service, is the natural and normal center of the religious cult. The associations that cluster about it, the ordinances that in their highest impressiveness can be administered only within its walls, make it exceedingly important that it should be to the whole community, and not to a part of it only, the place of stated worship.

Coming back, then, to the principle of making the church edifice the center of effort, and of laboring to attract to its services those who are now beyond the pale of its influence, earnest souls have conceived two further plans. One is that of the social settlement. Church people are to move down into the midst of irreligious and even vicious communities and live, thus in a certain sense identifying themselves with them, coming into close contact and intimate acquaintance, seeking by modest example and helpful word to win them to Christ and the church. This plan has the advantage of being in the direction of drawing to the church and not to some substitute for it; but it has this serious and apparently insuperable difficulty, that it is, as looked upon by the people whom it aims to reach, unnatural and abnormal,

and without any other motive than that of religious propagandism. "Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird." If a man goes down into one of these communities in the pursuit of some legitimate business calling; if he opens a store or a business office which requires his presence, and then makes use of every opportunity of cultivating acquaintance, exhibiting sympathy, giving counsel, administering relief, inviting and soliciting attendance with him upon the services of his church, a great deal may be accomplished; but under the conditions ordinarily attending it, the social settlement involves a very large expenditure of means with comparatively little prospect of return.

The other method, that of the Institutional Church, would carry us beyond the limit of this paper, if we should enter upon a full discussion of it. Suffice it to say that the work it contemplates lies entirely outside of the sphere of the church, as marked out by her divine Lord. Her business is to preach the Gospel, to administer the sacraments, to exercise discipline for spiritual ends, and to carry her blessed ministry to the sick, the suffering, and the sorrowing. She has no commission to open industries, to conduct intelligence offices, and to provide literary entertainment and wholesome amusement for the people. These are things for Christian people to do, but not for the Church in her organized capacity. The dissipation of her energies upon these purely secular things lowers the standard of her spirituality, and tends to degrade her from a divine institute for the salvation of men to a mere philanthropic association or a social club.

How then are the non-churchgoing masses to be reached? The answer we would suggest is threefold, and is based upon the principle that, while mission chapels, street preachings, and Salvation Army methods may subserve a temporary purpose, nothing but the influence of the Christian sanctuary can meet the deep and permanent necessities of the case.

First, the non-churchgoing masses must be made to feel that they are welcome in our churches. They know that they are welcome in the palatial business houses of the city. They are met and bowed in by the stylish floor-manager; they are waited on with smiling face and engaging manners by the salesmen; they are bowed out with a smile and a request to call again when their purchases are made. What kind of welcome meets them in our palatial churches? The pastor of one of our large city churches stated publicly, a short time since, that he would like very much to have the working-people come to his church, but that the painful fact was that if two hundred of the working-people were to come in at the front door, an equal number of his best supporters would go out at the back door. This is a pretty state of things, to be sure! Let us stop for a moment and consider how it is brought about. For you will notice that this difficulty is not to any considerable degree found in Roman Catholic churches. In

the splendid cathedral the wife of the millionaire and the working-girl kneel and worship side by side; neither is disturbed by the presence of the other. Why is it not so in the Protestant church? Why do those two hundred of the upper circle feel that they must withdraw? Simply because membership and worship in the same sanctuary imply with the Roman Catholic no obligation of social recognition of any kind. The church is a place of religious worship, not of social recognition. The fact that a woman enters a parish, and is enrolled as a communicant, creates no social obligation on the part of other women of the parish. But in our Protestant churches we harp upon the merely social element of church life. We lay it upon the conscience of every sister to cultivate the acquaintance and promote the social enjoyment of every new sister that comes in. We toil and tug over our church sociables, church teas, and everything of this kind, trying to break down the walls of social separation in the congregation. In our efforts to make oil and water mix we only advertise and make more apparent the social lines that, right or wrong, we can not obliterate. And thus, as the churches are being run as social clubs, naturally those of one social station want a club exclusively of those of their own station. As the church sociables, church teas, etc., are held in the building erected for divine worship, the church building itself becomes associated in the minds of the outsiders with social ostracism, and they persuade themselves that their presence, even at the religious services, is unwelcome.

It would, perhaps, be regarded as so radical a position as to exclude the writer from all further hearing if he should suggest the abandonment of the whole idea of a distinctive church life, but he trusts that he may be heard when he suggests that this "church life," with its accompaniments of church parlors, church kitchens, church sociables, church teas, etc., be removed at least five blocks from the place where public worship is stately held, so that it may be understood that they have no connection with each other, and that attendance stately upon the worship in God's house involves no kind of obligation to be at the church sociable or the church tea. The sooner we come back to the idea of the church as a place for religious worship, and not a place for social recognition and mutual acquaintance, the sooner will the non-churchgoers come to feel at home, and to come and go as they now do in business houses and places of popular amusement.

Second, there must be deeper personal interest and more earnest individual effort in inducing the non-churchgoers to attend religious worship. There is no use of public meetings in the interest of the non-churchgoing masses, with spread-eagle oratory and long strings of resolutions. What we need is personal, hand-to-hand work. If in any church of five hundred members every member could be induced to see privately and invite cordially to the church services every non-churchgoer of his acquaintance, the church would soon be filled

to overflowing. One great secret of the crowds that flock to Mr. Moody's services is the admirable use which he makes of this element of private, personal effort.

Finally, we must look to and rely upon the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. These non-churchgoers have a natural antipathy to the Gospel which nothing but the power of the Spirit can overcome. We must give up all taffy, all clap-trap, all sensationalism, all whoop and hurrah. We must come back to the Gospel in its simplicity and its power. If a copy of "Christ's Trumpet-Call to the Ministry" could be put in the hands of every gospel minister; if some similar book could be put in the hand of every Christian layman; if a thoroughly revived church could go down on its knees before God in prayer for a Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit, there would soon be no non-churchgoing masses. The Gospel would demonstrate its sovereign efficacy and power. Our churches would be filled to overflowing. Public halls, theaters, and auditoriums of every kind would be required to accommodate the multitudes that would be attracted by the magnetism of the Gospel of Christ, and so upon all the pots and vessels of commerce and of trade should be inscribed "Holiness to the Lord."

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## II.—THE PULPIT AND LIBERTY.

BY W. S. LILLY, BARRISTER, LONDON, ENGLAND, AUTHOR OF  
"ON RIGHT AND WRONG," "ON SHIBBOLETHS," ETC.

I SHALL never forget the delight with which, as a boy, I read Trench "On the Study of Words." It appeared to open out new intellectual horizons to me. To the present day it is one of the favorite books in my library. I take it down from time to time, and turn over its pages with ever-renewed interest. One of the most interesting of the seven lectures which it contains is the one in which he deals with the ethical aspect of his subject. And one of the most interesting paragraphs of this lecture is that in which, referring to South's grand sermon "On the Fatal Imposture and Force of Words," he observes how often they lead us captive at will. The same thought was quaintly expressed by the elder Mirabeau, who likened men to rabbits: "Stupid animals, easily taken by the ears." I suppose it is in the nature of things that this should be so. Most of us are obliged to adopt our opinions ready-made. We have neither the intellectual cultivation nor the leisure for investigating them philosophically or analyzing them critically. Hence the wide influence of catchwords, shibboleths, claptrap. An apt phrase appeals powerfully to the imagination. I do not question the definition of man as "a reasonable animal." But assuredly it is rather by the fancy than by the reason that the many are dominated. And we live in an age when political