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# THE PEW SYSTEM

IN

THE NATIONAL CHURCH.

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WHY DO NOT THE PEOPLE WORSHIP?

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AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT

SION COLLEGE, LONDON,

ON THURSDAY, 18TH MARCH, 1869,

BY

HENRY CLARK, ESQ.

OF LIVERPOOL.

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“ WHY SHOULD WE GRUDGE THE HOUR AND HOUSE OF PRAYER

“ TO CHRIST’S OWN BLIND AND LAME,

“ WHO COME TO MEET HIM THERE ? ”

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PUBLISHED BY

THE LONDON FREE AND OPEN CHURCH ASSOCIATION,

25, NORFOLK STREET STREET, STRAND. W.C.

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LONDON:

JAMES PARKER & CO., 377, STRAND.

1869.

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“WHO MAKETH THEE TO DIFFER FROM ANOTHER, AND WHAT HAST  
THOU THAT THOU DIDST NOT RECEIVE?”

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“HOW MUCH LESS TO HIM THAT ACCEPTETH NOT THE PERSONS OF  
PRINCES, NOR REGARDETH THE RICH MORE THAN THE POOR?  
FOR THEY ARE ALL THE WORK OF HIS HANDS.”

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# THE PEW SYSTEM IN THE NATIONAL CHURCH.

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## WHY DO NOT THE PEOPLE WORSHIP?

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“**H**ERE are the Churches, but where are the masses?” is a thought and an enquiry unceasingly disturbing the minds of earnest Churchmen. “Why do not the people worship?” enquire many who are in despair at the fact that they do not; and who seem alike blind and helpless both as to the causes and the remedies of the evil. It is, indeed, an anomalous and saddening spectacle, that a great Christian nation, sometimes claiming to be the religious salt of the earth, should, in the 19th century, be so non-worshipping that LORD SHAFTESBURY should be able to affirm that 98 out of every 100 working men we meet in the streets of the Metropolis, attend neither Church nor Chapel on the Lord’s Day.

This problem I am now attempting to solve, and, at the outset, I fearlessly assert that the first condition necessary to make the people in this or any other country a worshipping people, is to make the places in which they should assemble for worship free and unrestricted to all comers. I do not say that this is the only condition: far from it. But I do say, that until this condition is complied with, until this Freedom is granted by those who now withhold it, until this Freedom is enjoyed by those from whom it is now withheld, all efforts to render our people a God-fearing, God-worshipping people are, and will be, practically futile.

In the first place, *What is this Freedom of Worship?* By these words I mean the same perfect Freedom to walk in and kneel down in God’s House, that every one has to walk on and frequent the Queen’s Highway; the consciousness, on the part of the poorest

man, not only that he has the same right and facility to use his Father's House that his rich neighbour has, but that a hearty welcome will greet him when he arrives there.

That this Freedom ought to exist, I shall endeavour to prove on various grounds :

And First, *on Religious and Christian grounds.*

The voice of the Church should proclaim aloud the message she has to deliver. Her orders are to *preach the Gospel to every creature.* Certain buildings are set apart in which this Gospel shall be preached, which buildings, if the command is to be obeyed, must be accessible to every creature. Anything, therefore, which impedes this free hearing of the sound of the Gospel is wrong, and defeats the mission of the Church.

As a Divine Institution the Church is comprehensive ; and universal, receiving all into her fold, irrespective of race or rank. A great *Catholic* spirit prevailing in her, befitting a religion common to the human race, all the members, being members of one body, have the same love one for another. Therefore, to reject any, to pay court to some and to despise others, is inadmissible in a true branch of the Catholic Church.

Again *Unity*, is one of her leading characteristics. The Prayer is that "they all may be *one.*" However differing in tastes, habits, manners, feelings, they have one thing in common. How can they prove their oneness better than when united in one holy fellowship in the act of worship? Where, but when assembled in God's Temple? Common worship is a most important and significant expression of unity. Whatever our divisions, there is one place at any rate of which the atmosphere should breathe of unity and peace.

True Religion, too, embraces self-denying *Charity*, which "seeks the lost, and loves the poor." True Religion implies at least kindness and courtesy in her assemblies of worshippers, from which no one is ever scared away. If one place in the building be more eligible than another, the habitual absentee, or the poor, or the



blind, or the deaf, nay, the outcast, are taken by the hand and placed there, and "the regular worshipper" is only too pleased to take the lowest place.

Another important Christian grace is *Humility*. When meeting together, the attitude of the worshipper is that of the Publican, who stood afar off ejaculating "God be merciful to me a sinner!" rather than that of the Pharisee who loved the chief seats, and thanked God he was not as other men were. "Any place is good enough for me, indeed I am not worthy to enter under Thy roof" should be the prevailing thought. Exclusiveness, pride, isolation, and display, are traits utterly unknown here.

And if any one feeling should be uppermost when entering God's House, it is that *there* at least *all men are equal*. The Almighty is no respecter of persons. They who presently will lie side by side in the grave, they who presently will stand side by side in the judgment, need not hesitate, while on earth, to kneel side by side in their Father's House. The perfect equality of rich and poor in worship involves a great Scriptural truth, and conveys a wholesome lesson. It is an educational means—teaching the rich man that his riches will avail him nothing, and the poor man that he must look beyond his poverty for his reward in the great Hereafter.

And, lastly, the building is a *Holy*,<sup>1</sup> consecrated, sacred House. It is not ours to deal with, but His, the Lord of the universe. This is none other than the House of God, this is the gate of Heaven.

"Put off thy shoes from off thy feet—

"The place where man his God shall meet,

"Be sure, is holy ground."

Therefore, to appropriate to oneself, or to traffic in such ground is surely a grave error.

Thus, on religious and Christian grounds, in the interests of the cultivation of Christian graces, perfect freedom should obtain in our Churches.

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1. "It is a characteristic of depraved Protestantism that it recognises far too little the Church as the Temple of God, and the special abode of the Shekinah."—"Minor Moralities of Life," by Rev. E. White.

And, accordingly, as an *Historical* fact, this Freedom has ever been recognised. It has existed from the earliest ages in every religion, whether true or false.

“ Old heathendom’s vast temples hold men of every fate ;  
The steps of far Benares commingle small and great ;  
The dome of St. Sophia confounds all human state.

The aisles of blessed Peter are open all the year ;  
Throughout wide Christian Europe the Christian’s right is clear  
To use God’s house in freedom, each man the other’s peer ;

Save only in that England, where this disgrace I saw,—  
England, where no man crouches in tyranny’s base awe,—  
England, where all are equal beneath the eye of law.”

As regards the Christian religion for 1,300 years after our Lord’s coming there was no appropriation, still less were there pew-rents. No such thing was permitted in the Jewish worship ; neither does the Eastern Church permit these worldly distinctions. The only Churches in which they are prevalent are the English, and the Roman in the North Western part of Europe.<sup>1</sup>

The way the introduction of Pews into our Parish Churches has been managed may be illustrated by a case in point, the facts of which have been given to myself by an eye witness.

At the beginning of the present century the fine Parish Church of Appleby, Atherstone, was, as all Churches had been, entirely open and available to all worshippers. But it entered the mind of an elderly lady that she would prefer to know where to sit. It was unpleasant to think that any body should be placed beside her. She accordingly begged to be allowed to put up a piece of boarding to screen herself off from the rest of the world. No sooner did this appear, than another wanted a partition to enable her to enjoy, as her own, some particular spot. Then an old man thought he would like to have some accomodation reserved for him. This closing in of the Church for private purposes gave its interior such an irregular and patchy

1. Of the latter it has been remarked : “ It is to be regretted that the custom should now have become universal of enclosing within a railing the entire central space, which cannot, therefore, be entered without paying, and for which the price is raised on the chief festivals.”—Paris Correspondent of *The Guardian*, March 31, 1869.

appearance that it was presently resolved to pew the whole building, which was accordingly done, a large share of the expense being defrayed by a family well known in the neighbourhood. The manner of the removal of the ancient landmarks in this Parish Church—landmarks which our fathers had set—has been testified by persons who have lived in the present generation.

And so this pew system has grown and grown, until it has become perfectly ingrained in our very Church life. We hug it to our bosoms, little aware how this cherished thing is sucking the Church's very life blood. Wherever the Anglican Communion penetrates there this system is set up. The Bishop of Wisconsin recently referred to an ancient Syrian Temple, which for century on century, whether used by Idolators, Mahommedans, or modern Christians had preserved its ancient freedom to its worshippers, and let it pass, he added, into whose hands it might, it would never lose this character, until it should fall into the hands of the Episcopal Church.

Now, if we have any misgivings on this subject let us look to the rock whence we are hewn. The Rev. Dr. MAGEE, now Bishop Peterborough, asks if the primitive Church had any pew rents. Do we read (he enquires) that Paul was appointed by the elders to a fashionable Church at Ephesus? Or, that James possessed an eligible proprietary Chapel at Jerusalem? We find that an entirely opposite spirit prevailed, and, instead of being partitioned off by themselves and shunned, the poor and outcast were especially welcomed and valued. The story is told of *St. Laurence*, how, when his judge demanded of him the treasures of the Church, he craved respite for three days, to gather together the Church's riches, in which space, against the time the governor should come to the doors of the Temple in the hope to receive his prey, a miserable rank of poor, lame, and impotent persons was provided, their names delivered up to him, as a true inventory of the Church's goods, and some few words used to signify how proud the Church was of these treasures. Respect of persons, honour to some, dishonour to others, was as a practice unknown in the early Christian assemblies, and God's poor were treated in the Church's earliest days as her most

valuable heritage. St. James' marked rebuke of the first symptoms of this sin would appear to have effectually banished it in the first ages of the Church.

Again, this freedom is in consonance with the teaching and spirit of our Prayer Book. This Book is called the Book of *Common Prayer*. There is the Priest, and there is the people. The former has a message to deliver, the latter a message to receive, and both together a worship to offer. They have a building in which to meet, a Consecrated Meeting House. If on the one side you have several thousand people, the inhabitants of the District; and on the other side, one man, the Priest of the District or Parish, it being desired to bring the two together, there is only one way to do it. You must have a building common to all, in which not a favored few, or a specified congregation, but *the* people can come together to hear and pray with the Minister. This building is the Parish Church. The Book of Common Prayer is the Book used therein, the Book in whose words we breathe to heaven in common the confession of our sins, our wants, our hopes and thanksgivings. The Church then in her Prayer Book recognises no distinctions between man and man. "Our mother the Church hath never a child to honor before the rest!"

And, *Economically* viewed, this Freedom is necessary. The Church is usually a comparatively small building, the population being usually a large one, and largely in excess of the number of the Church's seats. The building, therefore, in order to be utilised to the utmost, must be free, and its internal arrangements such that not a seat be wasted. *Pews* involve a great waste of Church space. A man takes a pew, which he likes to have to and for himself, so that two or three sittings usually remain vacant.

Again, such are the circumstances of life that illness, the state of the weather, absence from home, indisposition to attend an early Service, reluctance to attend a late one, or a thousand accidents render constant attendance impossible. Thus a pewed Church, except under extraordinary circumstances, never can be full. Over and over again have we accurately counted the attendance at the

Churches of popular preachers in Liverpool, the result of which has been to show that usually 50 per cent. of the seats are unoccupied.

And *the waste of money* is amazing. A multiplication of services under a system of pews is impossible. In such a Church, costing it may be thousands of pounds, it is useless for a clergyman to give more services in the day than one devout man can endure.

Here we have an extensive machinery constructed and put into motion at vast public and private cost, and only performing a minimum instead of a maximum of its work. In any other institution, such wasteful economy of means would not be tolerated for a day. Are we as a nation to submit to that which as individuals we should condemn? Are we to accept unmoved deficiencies like these in a great public and national Institution? Year after year rolls on, one generation passeth away, and another generation cometh, increased energies everywhere are developed, "Improvement," "Forward!" are our mottoes; but our Churches for the most part remain the same dead, half empty, practically unused buildings they were 50 years ago!<sup>1</sup>

And let me incidently ask why do we build, or contribute to the building of Churches? Surely not to convert them into private Chapels for private use, and still less to obtain a something in return—an equivalent, in the form of private rights in the building, say for a life time! Instead of making the gift an occasion to barter, it should be humbly presented with the sole desire to promote God's glory, and to benefit those who cannot build Churches for themselves. Never is money more misdirected than when making a limited number of well-to-do Pewholders the recipients of our alms, and presenting them gratis with a costly building with its reserved seats, their only liability being a small annual charge sufficient to pay the minister, and from which they can exempt themselves at any time by giving a quarter's notice.

Again, *Legally considered*. The law maintains "The use of the body of the Church is common to all parishioners."<sup>2</sup> "All the pews in the Parish Church are the common property of the parish,

1. See Appendix : Church attendance in Liverpool.

2. *Ayliffe : Parergon*, p. 484, *Parliamentary Remembrancer*, March 1860

and are for the use in common of the parishioners, who are *all* entitled to be seated orderly and conveniently so as best to provide for the accommodation of all.<sup>2</sup> The title to the free use of their own property by the Parishioners was recognised in 1857 by a Committee of the House of Lords.<sup>3</sup>

In order to preserve order, and to protect the rights of the parishioners, certain officers being laymen are invested with authority over the general arrangements of the Church. They act as officers of the ordinary, and as officers of the parish, and one of their chief duties is to secure to *all* the parishioners accommodation in their own Church. In former times there were no seats whatever, and people used to stand or kneel. If there was any covering on the floor, it was that afforded by rushes. For convenience, seats have been introduced of various kinds from time to time—but of whatever form or material they may be, they should have but one design, one actual use, viz., simply to assist every inhabitant of the parish in his attendance upon Divine Service.

With respect to these seats, the warden's duty now is precisely what it was before the Reformation, when as it is well known there were no pews and no assignment or appropriation whatever.

In many old Parish Churches, such as Manchester, Prestwich, Deal, the warden's duty to "seat the parishioners" has always been, and still is, to let all worshippers come in at every service as early as they think fit, and seat themselves in any seat then vacant. If, however, a warden determines upon carrying out what the law permits him to do, viz. : to seat the parishioners himself, "how is the allotment to be made?" This question requires another to precede it, viz. : "who are entitled by law to the use of the seats?" The answer is, *all* the parishioners equally and without respect of persons are so entitled. The wardens must then proceed to allot in

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2. *Fuller v. Lane. Oliphant's Laws of Pews.*

3. "Returning to the normal state of things, where it remains unaffected by any special privilege, we have seen that *the body of every Parish Church belongs of common right to all the parishioners*; and this right cannot lawfully be defeated by any permanent appropriation of particular places." Report of Committee of the House of Lords on the deficiency of the Means of Spiritual Instruction.—1858, page xviii.

such manner as to accommodate all the parishioners equally, and without respect to persons. The only way to do this, or to approximate to this in large parishes, is at each service to allot to those who *do* attend, and in order of their arrival, and not to those who *may* attend. And this allotment, we believe, is best carried out by allowing parishioners to seat themselves in an orderly manner as they arrive.

Not only by the law of the land, then, is the Parish Church free and common to the use of all the parishioners, but by *the law of Equity* this position can also be maintained. To such Church a certain territory is assigned, within which no other Church can be built, except with the consent of the Incumbent, a consent rarely granted (particularly if the Church is dependent upon pew rents, in which case competition is rather avoided than encouraged). If therefore the building of new Churches within the district is thus rendered difficult, if not impossible, the right of free entry into the Mother Church ought surely to be permitted. To close the Mother Church to the people, and at the same time to obstruct the provision of other means of worship for them cannot be justified on any principle of fair dealing.

And in a *National Establishment* this Freedom of worship should be extended to all. The Church, as national, is under compact to provide religious instruction for all the people of the land, all of whom have a full and equal claim upon the services, whether private or public, of the parish clergyman.

Now, here are one or two considerations I would earnestly impress upon all who value the retention of our Church as a National Establishment: If a Church is not doing national work, as a teacher of the whole nation, and particularly of the poor, can it be called the National Church? Does not the pew system practically limit the exercise of the office of teacher to a small minority, to whom the buildings are assigned, leaving a very few seats only to the great majority whose rights as Christian citizens are equal? If so, is such an Establishment any more doing national work than Non-conformity? and if not, can it claim the rights and immunities of an Establishment?

These are suggestive considerations, particularly to those who desire that our Church shall continue to be recognised and distinguished as the nations's teacher. The Irish branch of the Church is at this moment being stripped of her dignities and possessions, because, in Mr. GLADSTONE'S own words: "The Irish Church did not fulfil the objects for which it was established. It was not the Church of the nation. It was not the Church of the Poor, it had miserably failed, and must continue to fail." The fact that she is not the Church of the People is of course notorious. Dr. TEMPLE, of Rugby, remarks that on one occasion a deeply attached member of the Church of England summed up to him the arguments against the Irish Church in a single sentence, and it was at the door of a Church in Ireland that the remark was made:—" *I feel ashamed, he said, of belonging to this Church!*" They attended the Services of the Church, and saw inside the Church what they never wished to see again. There was not a single poor person in the Church. There they were, all as respectable as possible, but they could not help feeling that this was not the kind of respectability that really belonged to Christianity, and could not feel that this was a character which ought to attach to a branch of the Church of Christ.

How far this lamented absence of the poor, and this very respectable character of the congregation, is a charge attachable to the Church of England others shall determine. But should it be so, the fate of the Irish will assuredly be ere long the fate of the English Establishment.

And here I would incidently remark how *Dissent* is encouraged, nay (if any sense of religion at all exists) is actually forced upon the people by the system of pews. The population of the parish is 5,000, the Church seating 800 favored individuals. The latter being all provided with pews of their own, what is to become of the remaining 4,200 parishioners? A few free seats may be offered to them, but these they decline. The nearest Chapel is at once resorted to by the excluded tradesman or artisan. They attach themselves by degrees



to this Chapel, and with their families are lost to the Church.<sup>1</sup>

I have thus endeavoured on various grounds—Religious, Christian, Historical, Economical, Legal, and National, to prove that this Freedom of Worship ought to exist in our Churches.

The great obstacles to freedom are pews, which have been defined by Dr. HOOK, in his Church Dictionary, as “Enclosed seats in Churches which enable people to attend Church and hear sermons comfortably and luxuriously;” and, by some one else to be “Religion made easy to the minority, but impossible to the majority of the community.” Now if we track this modern encroachment to its source we find its spring to be *selfishness*, which when taking an ecclesiastical form, has been described by Dr. HARRIS (the gifted author of the Prize Essay “Mammon”), to be “That modification of selfish piety which lives only to be personally comforted, and in all its reading and hearing makes its own individual comfort not a means but an end.” Now, when we consider the vital interests at stake, that this is an affair which affects man’s condition for eternity; that when meeting together in God’s House, in His Presence, we should meet as Christians, whose first and cardinal principle is that they should love one another, and deny themselves for others’ good; in such a place, and under such circumstances, deliberately to seize upon the best situations (or, what is sometimes the case, upon all) for ourselves, and leave the worst places, if any, as a miserable pittance for the poor, feeding them like Lazarus with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table, is conduct which will bear no other designation than selfish. It has been well observed by the Rev. J. C. RYLE: “Let us beware of selfishness in religion. We should labor to make all men see that we have found the pearl of great price, and that we want them to find it as well as ourselves. A man’s religion may be well suspected when he is content to go to heaven *alone*. The true Christian will have a large heart, but if a man is satisfied to burn his candle alone, he is

1. The Rev. W. A. WHITWORTH, of St. Luke’s, Liverpool, publicly stated this very month, that he suddenly missed from his Church a devout middle aged man, and fearful that he had fallen away, he called upon him, and found that he had gone to Mr. LOCKHART’S dissenting Chapel, because there, being free to all, he could get a good seat. The fact was that when attending the Church, he had asked the beadle to let him sit nearer the pulpit, as he could not hear, but he was told there was no place for him but the gallery, and so he went to Mr. LOCKHART’S Chapel.

in a very weak and sickly state of soul." Now, if this propensity of our evil nature be really present in our assemblies for public worship, if it be the moving cause of the tenacity with which the greater part of the Church seats are held by private individuals, I ask whether any wide spread amount of good can be expected to flow from such so called public worship? Can pure and undefiled Christianity be propagated by such machinery throughout the world? If the source be impure, can the stream be pure?

This division of the House of God into separate private compartments is justified on grounds such as these:—"The regular worshipper has a right to his own seat." But what is to prevent his occupying, as often as he likes, if early enough, the same seat in a free Church? Great sympathy is felt for the "regular" worshippers, or the few folded sheep; but, surely, equal solicitude should be shown for the "irregular," or the many stray sheep—the hundreds who are only casual attendants, and the thousands who never enter the sacred precincts at all. A pew of one's own implies an advantage to its owner, or it does not. If there be no advantage, why insist upon it? Whilst if there be an advantage, such advantage implies a corresponding disadvantage to some one else. In the present instance, the advantage conferred is on the supposed religiously minded man, whilst the disadvantage, or disability, falls on the careless or the irreligious man. Now, conduct such as is here involved, does not harmonise with the ordinary rules which govern society. If, for example, from humane motives, we wish to extend the benefits of medical care, we do not select the strong and the healthy, but rather the weak and the diseased. The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. And if, from religious motives, we desire to convey the healing tidings of the Gospel, it is surely only reasonable to go first to those, who, having never heard them, are suffering from the disease of sin, than to those who are in possession of those tidings already. Our Saviour came "To call not the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

But in this matter a duty devolves upon the "regular" pew-holder, as well as upon the Church. If the former has the

knowledge of the next world's good, "and seeth that his brother hath need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" With the advantage of a pew of his own, instead of selfishly enjoying it all to himself, being a Christian man, and ready to undergo personal sacrifice for the sake of religion, would it not be more becoming of him to take his "irregular" non-worshipping neighbour by the hand, giving him the pew, he himself taking the lowest seat, feeling almost too unworthy even to enter under God's roof? Nor would such an act of self-sacrifice fail of his reward, who, in converting the sinner from the error of his way, "saves a soul from death, and hides a multitude of sins."

Another justification is, "Families are divided." We reply that never was there such division created in the great family of man, never was the brotherhood more rent asunder, than by this unnatural estrangement. But, if this question, involving such an awful issue, is to be decided by reference to personal convenience, it is best answered by a practical experience of free churches—an experience of which those who urge this difficulty are usually devoid. If a family arrive late, of course a little inconvenience will be the penalty, but with the Church doors opened sufficiently early, why should not all, on arrival, select and take their seats at leisure? If the services are still crowded, we are thankful they are so appreciated, and a powerful reason is given for their multiplication. In several Roman Catholic Chapels in Liverpool, six services are held every Sunday before noon, many being crowded. These buildings fill and empty themselves several times during the day, and if this process is not only possible, but successful, in their case, who can say that it should not be so with us?

The extent to which buildings can be utilised for public worship, may be learnt from an actual count of the number who attended the services in the Roman Catholic Chapels on a particular Sunday in 1855.—See Appendix.

Again, "But you would not have me seated side by side with a dirty person!" In the first place, we would remind the objector that

uncleanly people certainly do not form a large proportion of an average congregation, that in a free Church it is not necessary to place oneself in contact with such people, and that even the much-loved pew, with its carpets, cushions, and linings, is not always free from annoyances. But if the great principle of equality in God's House be incontrovertible, no purely personal feelings can be allowed to violate them. And let us observe the pure selfishness of this objection. Not a whisper is raised against free seats in a pewed Church, not a protest is heard against the dirt, which, from time to time, may be found therein, not a word of sympathy is expressed for the cleanly poor, who use these seats, and have the same shrinking from impurity that their betters may have; but, whilst protesting against the infliction of "the dirty worshipper" upon himself personally, the pew-holder unhesitatingly imposes this character upon the respectable poor in their free seats. Again,—is the modern Christian's course through this world to be one of unbroken luxuriance and self-indulgence? We recur, from time to time, with feelings of admiration, to the persecutions of the early Church, to the martyrdoms of the Reformation, nay, even to the self-denial of missionaries of our own day, holy men and women who have dedicated themselves to God, and is the Christian pewholder of the 19th century to be the only person who refuses to make any sacrifice for the good of others, even in the interests of religion, to the refusing to forego private seats in a Church, for fear of encountering a little annoyance? But instead of losing, it might be found that he was a gainer by the surrender of the long-cherished pew. It might break down the high partition wall between himself and the poor, arousing his better sympathies, and urging him to active efforts to promote cleanliness and other virtues in the houses and in the persons of his humbler neighbours. "The great want of the age is more sympathy between classes," said the late Judge Talfourd a little before his death; and this sympathy, we submit, may be quickened into life by establishing perfect equality in public worship.

The catalogue of evils chargeable to this pew system is heavy and long. But I will take one case, that of *The Young*. I put it one day to an eminent clergyman what became of his Sunday School boys, the rows of whom lined the aisles of his Church at the Sunday

morning service, after they had left the Sunday School: "If not in Church, why were they not in Church?" "Indeed, sir," was the reply, "that is an awful question!" And an awful thought it is that Christ's little ones are thus cast out from the fold just at the moment in life when they most need oversight and direction, and that a barrier is then set up against them. "Where is the flock that was given thee—that beautiful flock?" is a question that some day must be answered. It is very evident that the present system is a failure as regards school children, who disappear from attendance at Church simultaneously with their leaving the School. On a recent occasion when distributing prizes at a Lancashire Sunday School, under the auspices of the Countess of Ellesmere, the superintendent stated that he had put down the names of 100 scholars who had attended his school, to try and find out what had become of them: of 23 he could learn nothing, and of the remaining 77 how many regularly attended a place of worship? Only 2—29 of the others were confirmed drunkards, and the rest were careless and lukewarm Christians—if Christians at all! Are we really using our faculties aright in this matter? Do we look on unmoved by the spectacle that the young, upon whom we have lavished our affections, and bestowed pains untold, and on whom good impressions have been created, thus abandon religious ordinances? Can we behold this declension without putting out a hand to retain them? When leaving the smaller fold, the Sunday School, can we not admit them into the larger fold, their own Church, and manifest to them that the Christian brotherhood is a reality, and that its rights and privileges are equally accorded to the youngest as well as the oldest?

And not only is it thus demonstrated that the pew system forbids the attendance of the people at Church, but the working classes themselves, when appealed to, justify their absence on this ground.<sup>1</sup>

1. At the conference on "the Working Classes and Public Worship," at the London Coffee House January, 21st, 1867. Present, among others, the Dean of Westminster, Revds. Dr. Miller, W. W. Champneys, J. E. Kempe, R. Maguire, The Hon. A. Kinnaird, M. P., Thos. Hughes, Esq., M. P., the following evidence was given:—

Mr. PATERSON, (Cabinet-maker).—"Christianity came into the world, and they were told that it was gladly received by the common people. The common people were very much the same now as they were then. If the people had not changed, there must be something, either in religion itself, or the way in which it was presented to them, that had changed, to give rise to the present extraordinary position of affairs, in which a religion which was

And what a disadvantage this close and congregational system is to *the Clergy* themselves! A Clergyman of Chester the other day publicly declared, that while he would desire with all his heart to be the Minister of his parish, the system under which he sincerely groaned, made him as it were the Minister of a section of the people. He therefore felt, if he might state his private opinion, in an unimportant position, where he ought to occupy one of greater importance. The Rector of Nantwich found that when he went among his people, they said he mocked them in asking them to go to a Church where they could not get a seat. And what a degrading reflection on the high and ministerial calling, was the experience of a Clergyman at Tunstall, who when he visited his people, and asked them to come to Church, overheard the observation: "O! all he wants me to come for is that I may take a sitting!" The pew system, then, is not only derogatory to the Clergyman's personal character, but is injurious also to his spiritual office.

The practical *evils of the Pew System are confessedly many and great*. But still, say many, they are a necessity. In the absence of an endowment, it is urged, you cannot otherwise provide for the Clergyman's stipend than by the Pew Rents. Now, *what is this Pew Rent?* It is a tax, and the effect of all taxes is to limit the use of the thing taxed. And, as the worst kind of tax is that which touches life or its necessaries, so the imposition of a tax on religion, which

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formerly received by the common people, and neglected by the richer classes, was now neglected by the former, and accepted by the latter. If a working man went to worship God he had to sit by the door in a draught, or in the free seats, labelled as 'a working man,' and he felt he was an alien and an outsider, and that he has not paid for his place. He did not wish to deny, for a moment, that men ought to support public worship, but he did not think it ought to be put in that way—so much Theology served over the counter for so much seat-rent."

MR. WYNNÉ, (Plasterer.)—"The distinction of classes was another great bar. If a working man was invited, he felt there was an intolerable gulf between the classes, and that it was a mere matter of condescension to recognise him as one of God's people outside the church."

MR. BEBINGTON, (Bookseller's Porter.)—"But, notwithstanding all these obstacles, there was a large number who might go to church if they would. Why did they not? Because whenever they attempted to go, they were made to feel more like intruders than welcome guests. He had known working men suffer the greatest possible distress and destitution rather than apply to the parish; and if they would suffer that, was it to be supposed that they would go to a church or chapel to be thus degraded? No; indeed they would not."

MR. SALMON, (ex-Seavenger.)—"Break down the pew doors, and, his word for it, when that system was abolished, they would have a large number of the working classes present, and their church finance would be increased."

deals with an eternal existence, and with the necessary preparation for it, is so dreadful, that one does not like to contemplate it as possible. How long is this buying and selling, and making merchandise of ground solemnly consecrated to God and to religion, this traffic in Christian ordinances and ministrations, to defile the worship of God? Can we offer a deeper insult to the great Master of the Temple, than to say to our fellow sinner at the Temple door, as they say to the play-goer at the theatre: "Thou shalt not enter here, if thou hast not the fee!" Can any practice more effectually keep back the ignorant or the unawakened; or the poor, those who have no money to pay, or if they had, no inclination to pay it?

But this Pew Rent—like the Pew, an innovation, a corruption, almost as gross as that of the Romish sale of indulgences—is *demoralising to the worshipper*, who naturally argues: "You have made your contract with me, I have accepted your terms, and paid the price. I have purchased, and you have sold, for a given period the right of use of so many square yards of God's House, and now I am relieved from all further claims!" Can any thing be more repressive to the spirit of sacrifice of self, or of substance, than a bargain like this? Is any thing more calculated to deaden spiritual aspirations than a process like this? Is this the way in which the Church proposes to convert the world?

And, not only do the spiritual interests of the pew-holder suffer, but the Church herself is harmed thereby.

And in a *two-fold* manner.

What is the cause of this *deadness of Church* life and feeling—of the impossibility of interesting people in Church affairs? Why the lack of earnestness and of spiritual life among pastors and people, exhibited in empty Churches, exemplified in a recent letter to the *Times*, showing that of 35 London Churches, all in one line or direction, the united congregations of 10 Churches did not exceed 100 persons, and only 1 out of the 35 contained upwards of 100 persons. Why is dissent flourishing, stalking through the length and

breadth of the land with a consciousness of power that ere long may extinguish the Church in England (as the light of that in Ireland is flickering out), contemplating the Establishment as an effete body, and smiling almost in derision at her powerless efforts to recover her lost hold of the people? "As Archdeacon DENISON said: "We have the Churches, but the Masses, where are they?" And why have we lost them? My explanation is that in Church worship, we have adopted the congregational instead of the parochial method, the private instead of the public, the sectional instead of the national, respectability instead of universality. We have preferred selfishness to consideration for others, the display of Mammon to devotion to the Church, the imposed tax to the cheerful offering. In a word the pew system has well nigh strangled, not only the Establishment, but Religion itself.

And, secondly, we complain of financial poverty. But why wonder there is poverty of purse, when there is such poverty of soul? The one is the natural result of the other. Archbishop TAIT has stated in a charge, that of the 885 Licensed Clergy in the Diocese of London, the average professional income was not more than £140 per annum. Now, if we examine into the circumstances of our Church Finance, there is no cause of surprise at the miserable pay our Clergy receive. They will not give up the Pew System, which limits contributions to a comparatively small number of persons, who pay a fixed rent for their pews, a sum very small often in proportion to their means. Under this system, elasticity is discouraged, the support rendered by the people is compressed within the narrowest limits, and the expression of personal attachment to the minister, or of zeal for the glory of God and souls of men, is suppressed. No wonder, then, that Pew rents have proved a signal failure in providing an adequate income for the clergymen. The few exceptions prove the rule, and, indeed, it is surprising that educated men can be found to occupy positions in which they are dependent upon them. The fact is, our clergy are worse paid, not merely than all other professions, but even than most trades, and that an educated gentleman, if a clergyman, will very likely receive for his services an income relatively smaller than that of his neighbour's butler, and less than that of his own Schoolmaster, proving incontestibly, that, under our present system,



the proper provision for the clergy is based upon principles altogether unsound and faulty. "Madame," said Archbishop WHITGIFT to QUEEN ELIZABETH, "Religion is the foundation and cement of human society, and when they that serve at God's Altar shall be exposed to poverty, religion shall be exposed to scorn and become contemptible."

*But we don't complain of an evil without offering a remedy*—a remedy which all Scripture, reason, common sense, history, past and present experience recommends, and has proved a success.

*The Weekly Offertory* is the ancient mode of receiving contributions into the Treasury of the Church. Not content only with the expression of confession, with prayer and praise, God requires a material gift—something more than words—an actual offering to be laid upon His Altar, as an essential part of worship, and indeed a central act of worship. The presentation of an offering in worship was not limited to the Jews, but passed on from the Jewish Church to the Christian Church.

Our duty in this respect has been lost sight of, the sense of responsibility for wealth is deadened in the minds of men. The clergy have not taught it. If they do urge it, it is done almost apologetically. There is no doctrine, no practice, which needs more urging and reviving than that of the Offertory. At present *it is a lost act of worship*.

Moreover, the blessedness of giving must not be left out of consideration. This blessedness can be enjoyed by, and ought to be permitted to the poor as well as the rich. Why should the poor be shut out from it? Did not our Lord declare it was more blessed to give than receive? He thought it no pity that the needy widow should give away her living and her mites. Giving will not make the poor, poorer; on the contrary, it will enrich them.

The Revenue derivable from this source may scarcely have a limit, and on this principle, that the Church is supported by all for all, not by the rich for the poor, not by the poor for the rich, but by the people for the people. The Offertory invites all to give, and the

opportunity of giving on every Lord's Day gradually leads to a fixed settled habit on the part of the Congregation. Every age, every grade of society, every member of a family, every stranger, some give more, some give less, but *all* are taught to cast their money into the Treasury of God. Why cannot the Church follow the example of the State, and see that every one should contribute something to her exchequer? A revenue derived from a number of small sums, received weekly, from a large number of people, vastly exceeds the amounts of large payments, made by a few persons at distant dates. The aggregate amount of silver and pence obtained in this way is marvellous, and is almost unintelligible to those who have not made acquaintance with the Church's great engine of Finance—The Weekly Offertory.

I have now availed myself of the opportunity thus kindly afforded me of bringing before so influential an assembly a subject most dear to my heart, viz.: that of Freedom of Worship. I have endeavoured, to the best of my humble powers, to show that this Freedom of Worship is based on religious grounds, and that it presents a field for the cultivation of the Christian graces. I have further endeavoured to prove that this freedom ought to exist in our Churches from the teaching of the Prayer Book, and on historical, economical, legal, and national grounds. I have sought to show the injurious effects of its converse, the Pew System, particularly to the young and to the clergy. I have endeavoured to demonstrate that the Pew Rent is a tax on religion, is demoralising to the Pew-holder, represses Church life and Church ardour, produces not only poverty of soul, but poverty of purse, and must lead to the destruction of the Church. The *remedy* for the Pew Rent has been shown to be the Weekly Offertory, a system based on the soundest financial principles, a cause of blessedness to the worshipper, and a grand source of revenue to the Church.

I submit that at least I have made out a case that should excite thought among those who have never thought seriously on the subject before, and that to those who may unthinkingly have adopted the Pew-Rent plan, a new view may have been

presented, exhibiting its unsound principles and fatal consequences. If such should be the case, and I pray God it may be so, I shall be most thankful. I am addressing a body of Clergy second to none in their influence. The cause I advocate is essential to the safety, nay existence, of the Church. Her adoption of it may still preserve her recognition by the nation. Do let us take the subject deeply to heart. Do let each one of us make it his first and foremost special duty and work to render our dear mother Church of England what she once was, and what I trust in future she will ever be—The Church of the People, and especially the Church of the Poor.



## APPENDIX.

### THE ATTENDANCE AT THE CHAPELS OF ROMAN CATHOLICS IN LIVERPOOL, AS ENUMERATED BY N. CAINE, ESQ.

[See *Liverpool Mercury*, September 25th, 1855.]

*Numbers as actually counted.*

	Seat Room.	First Service.	Second Service.	Third Service.	Fourth Service.	Fifth Service.	Sixth Service.	Tot. morn. and even.
St. Nicholas.....	1,050	436	541	518	1,723	737	...	3,955
St. Patrick .....	2,000	1,357	1,791	970	2,330	1,184	...	7,632
St. Francis Xavier ...	1,600	455	522	1,302	510	...	...	2,789
St. Mary .....	2,000	1,000	1,073	846	1,035	1,345	538	5,837
St. Alban .....	800	805	886	188	...	...	...	1,879
St. Joseph .....	1,800	441	572	438	1,039	1,236	...	3,726
Holy Cross .....	700	355	576	758	163	...	...	1,852
St. Anthony.. .....	2,000	1,262	1,270	1,224	1,087	1,594	706	7,143
St. Peter .....	1,200	406	492	556	1,195	994	...	3,643
St. Vincent de Paul...	550	386	373	484	238	...	...	1,481
St. Anne .....	800	377	478	426	213	...	...	1,494
St. Augustine .....	700	472	594	916	326	...	...	2,308
Oratory, Hope Street.	400	311	319	373	...	...	...	1,003
<b>Total .....</b>	<b>15,600</b>	<b>8,063</b>	<b>9,487</b>	<b>8,999</b>	<b>9,859</b>	<b>7,090</b>	<b>1,244</b>	<b>44,742</b>

Mr. CAINE summarises his returns as follows :—

The Church of England has 55 places of worship, with seat-room for 62,209 persons. Now the actual attendance (adults and children), is only 24,857; so that there is an unoccupied space in the Church of England in Liverpool, for 37,352 persons; or, in other words, there are equal to 37 unoccupied Established Churches, capable of holding 1,000 persons each. In fact if we take the persons (adults and children) attending the Churches of England, morning, afternoon, and evening, the united number attending all the services only reaches 44,792: so that if all the persons who go to Church, morning, afternoon, and evening, were to attend at one time, there would still be seat-room for 17,417 persons, there being then unoccupied space equal to 17 Churches, capable of holding 1,000 each.

The Presbyterians have 9 Chapels, with seat-room for 8,680. The attendance in the morning is 3,762, so that their Churches are not half filled, leaving unoccupied space equal to nearly 5 Churches, capable of holding 1,000 persons each.

The Unitarians have 4 Chapels, with seat-room for 1,900. The attendance in the morning is 920, or rather less than one-half. The number attending the whole of their services is only 1,638.

The Baptists have 11 Chapels, accommodating 7,100 persons. The attendance is 2,404, or nearly one-third the number for which seat-room is provided. The attendance at all the services is 5,960.

The Independents have 11 Chapels, capable of holding 8,450. The attendance is 3,406, or scarcely one-half for which there is accommodation. The attendance at the whole of the services is 7,282.

The various sects of Methodists have 34 places of worship, with seat-room for 24,364. The attendance is only 7,870, so that there are equal to 16½ empty Methodist Chapels, capable of holding 1,000 each. At the whole of the services the attendance only reaches 16,494.

The Roman Catholics have 13 places of worship, with seat room for 15,600. The attendance at the morning services, which are continued for several hours to accommodate different congregations, is 37,366; the evening service, 7,406; the total attendance throughout the day being 44,742.

## THE FINANCIAL AND NUMERICAL RESULTS OF FREE AND OPEN CHURCHES.

In reply to the inquiry frequently made for practical proof:

1.—That unappropriated Churches can be rendered self-supporting by means of the Weekly Offertory, and—

2.—That Churches once rented or appropriated, but now free and unappropriated, produce as large, or a larger revenue under the new system, when compared with the former, the Chester Diocesan Open Church Association have collected valuable and instructive information, which has just been published in the form of a tract. From this are extracted a few out of many instances, cited therein.

### FINANCIAL RESULTS.

Benefice.	Under Pew Rents or Appropriation.	From Offertory when Free & Unappropriated.
BRADFORD, <i>St. Jude</i> .....	{ Under Pew Rent .....£175 } „ Appropriation 215 }	£400
BUXTON, <i>St. John</i> .....	£350.....	1866... 595. 1867... 708. 1868... 820.
KIRKLEY, Suffolk .....	1861... 21 ..	When free, 1st year 102. „ 2nd „ 97. „ 3rd „ 148. „ 4th „ 164. „ 5th „ 197. „ 6th „ 239.
LONDON, <i>St. Mary</i> , Plaistow.....	90 .....	150.
„ <i>St. Peter</i> , Windmill Street ...	40 rose immediately to	200.
NOTTINGHAM, <i>St. Mary</i> , .....	600 .....	800.
SHEFFIELD, <i>St. Jude</i> .....	30 .....	252.
WREXHAM, Parish Church.....	Small .....	250.
YORK, <i>All Saints</i> .....	74 .....	273.

### NUMERICAL RESULTS.

Population.	Church Room.	before change.	Attendance After change. Doubled, often densely packed in even.
BRADFORD, <i>St. Jude</i> ... ..Mixed, chiefly mill hands.	750	—	} Doubled, often densely packed in even. 110.
GAINSBOROUGH, Springthorpe 300	130	20	400 to 500
JARROW, <i>St. Paul</i> ... .. 20,000	600	150	350.
LONDON, <i>St. Peter</i> , Windmill-st. 5,200	760	250	600.
„ <i>St. Philip</i> , Clerkenwell 10,000 }	600	Ground floor { Small	Morn. 200. Even. 350. Morn. 400. Even. 800.
„ <i>St. Mary</i> , Plaistow 2,500	500		
NANTWICH.....	—	—	Doubled. { Morn. 350. Even. 700.
NOTTINGHAM, <i>St. Mary</i> .....	6,000	1,200	1,000.
SHEFFIELD, <i>St. Jude</i> .....	—	950	Crowded.
WELLINGTON .....	8,000	1,200	Ditto 1866 1,200
WESTBOURNE, Sussex .....	—	—	„ 1867 1,300 „ 1868 1,800
YORK <i>All Saints</i> .....	1,417	492	— 3 or 4 times larger.

GENERAL EXPERIENCE OF  
FREE & UNAPPROPRIATED CHURCHES.

(Extracted from the Tract referred to in the previous page.)

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BIRKENHEAD. *New Ferry, St Mark.*—A public meeting was held here on November 20th, 1866, the Rector in the chair, to consider the propriety of appropriating the seats of the Church. The meeting was largely attended by the parishioners and the congregation; and, with one single dissentient, the conclusion unanimously arrived at was, that as the free system had, since the opening of the Church many months ago, worked so exceedingly well and so entirely to the satisfaction of all parties, no change at all should be made. In such Churches as this, one just excuse is taken from the people, viz., that there is no seat for them.

BIRMINGHAM. *St. Matthias.*—By all means let bags be used. The conscience of the worshipper is appealed to. He is delivered from the temptaton to a feeling of shame if the offering is small, and ostentation if the offering be large.

CALNE, Wilts.—The system of non-appropriation is one which, once tried, would never, I think, be abandoned.

CHESTER. *The Cathedral.*—The Free Evening Services: Dense congregations, including an immense number of the poor, now assemble every Sunday in the nave of the Cathedral.

LIVERPOOL. *St James the Less.*—The success of the offertory, especially in poor districts, depends on frequent collections of small sums. Our daily evensong collection adds considerably to our total.

NANTWICH.—Since this Church has been thrown open, the attendance of the middle classes has greatly increased, while that of the working-classes has increased *tenfold at least*. And I am bold to say, that the various classes of people in this parish are beginning to understand each other better, and to entertain proper sympathy towards each other. The introduction of the weekly offertory last year, it was feared, by some, would reduce the attendance, but it has not affected it in the least.

PADDINGTON. *St. Mary Magdalene*. By all means make the people your confidants, in sums received and mode of expenditure, by balance-sheets. Always let them know to what they are giving, and rigidly spend the money for objects to which it was meant to be devoted.

PLAISTOW. *St. Mary*.—The people have been educated to the offertory by our Mission Church, so that after a time there was a pressure upon me, rather than from me. By our children's service we train our children to give.

REDDITCH. *Headless Cross*.—Place the subject of the offertory plainly before the people. Let them understand that the offertory is an important part of public worship. Then commence with it; even if not generally acceptable, it will soon become so.

STEPNEY. *St. Luke's Mission Chapel*.—As a means of education, present the offertory. Above all, let the clergyman put into it his own quota of liberality.

WARRINGTON.—Our church is well filled with poor people at the evening services. We have had to put benches down the aisle, and last Sunday evening more than forty people could not get seats. This sort of thing we never saw under the old system, and I am proud to see the people assert their rights, and seat themselves where they like.

YORK. *The Cathedral*.—The service in the nave attracts immense congregations. Its charm is its perfect freedom. The seats are open, and the vergers are conspicuous by their absence. The dissenting tradesman may be found in great force. Most inspiring is the spectacle of 2,000 or 3,000 people thus joining in the worship of God.













