

HOW TO USE AN OPEN CHURCH.

It is a mistake to lock up the House of God and only open it for Service. How much better that, at any time, we should be able to go into it for a quiet prayer, or a few minutes' thought on holy things, to rest and refresh ourselves, turning aside out of the dusty weary ways of toiling life. Yes, we all agree that is the right thing to have our churches open as much as possible; but we English are terribly slow, it seems to me, in *taking advantage of this great privilege*. It is very different abroad. There you find on the door-steps of a church baskets and parcels, left there by those who have gone inside for a few moments; and if you pass through the open doors you are sure to find, kneeling here and there, absorbed in prayer, women and children, rich and poor alike, and although their devotions may be tainted with superstition, and more frequently addressed to the Saints than to God, yet we cannot but admire their simple piety, and wish that our own people were equally disposed to use an open church as it is meant to be used.

For the object of having an open church is *private prayer and meditation*.

The first thing that we ought to do, when we enter a church, is *to realise God's presence* in His Holy House; and if we do so, we shall at once kneel down for a few moments to offer Him the honour due to His Holy Name. Then having done that, we can quietly inspect, with reverent demeanour and hushed voice, whatever we are desirous of seeing.

HAVE COURAGE TO COMMENCE!

But, after all, churches are not left open merely *to be seen*. There are many people who really have no quiet place at home, where they can say their prayers or meditate on holy things. For these the open church is an untold blessing, and for those who have no difficulty in obtaining quiet and privacy at home, a few minutes spent in the still church, with all its sacred associations, is a wonderful help to spiritual-mindedness. Many persons, I am convinced, feel this, but have not the courage to commence the practice of going into a church as they are passing to pray and meditate. They are afraid that any should see them, and remark that they are setting up to be more religious than their neighbours. This miserable cowardice must be got over; it is quite unworthy of anyone called, in Baptism, to be "Christ's faithful soldier and servant," and "not ashamed to confess the faith" of Our Blessed Lord. Let us remember too, that everyone who has the courage to enter on this practice of using an open church, makes it easier for others, more timid, to do so, for the commoner the practice grows the less attention it will attract. It is also a great help to the clergy and churchwardens the open church should be much used; if the inner swing-doors of our churches were opening and closing as often as those of a Free Library, no dishonest person would have much chance of committing robbery and sacrilege, and all trouble and expense about "watchers" or "caretakers" would be at an end.

PRAYER.

And first, as to Prayer. You want to know what you shall pray about,