

Church and Home.

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"Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it."

"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord."

The Bible Jew was at that time of day the most religious on the face of the earth. He lived in the fear of the God of his father, and the Divine presence was a member of his house, lending to it indescribable beauty and mystery. This Jew never made the immense and indescribable mistake of separating between the church and the home. It should ever be borne in mind that all the strength and all the purity which one expected from the church must come from the strong and healthy life which abounded in Christian homes. It was in the home where the Jew and where we also should conceive an immortality, and it was in the temple of Christ that we only could learn its real significance. Perhaps the greatest work two people could set their hearts to do on this earth was to create a home, and if two persons did nothing else but raise and maintain a home filled with faith, God, and the love of man, then they deserved well of the commonwealth of England. Home should never be considered as a mere sort of sublimated lodging-house, where it was possible, perhaps, to obtain more comfort than living in rooms. Home was the nursery of human life by every arrangement of nature, whilst it was also the place where the beauty of a woman's moral character comes to flower, and where a man learned to lose that selfishness which was his wont and to become a self-sacrificing individual. Home was the place where character and manhood's real strength was formed, and it behoved them to take care that no impious hand should be placed upon the sanctity of the home. Home above everything was a citadel of God, and it would be an unspeakable disaster, a crash that would shake not only the foundations of the church, but society as well, were any attack made upon this citadel. In the matter of home the first necessity was, of course, a house, that was, until we became dismembered spirits, and he doubted whether a good home could be formed where more than one family lived in a house. There were country districts as well as those of the great cities which were sadly stained by immorality, too often caused by overcrowding. To his mind, a good house was essential to the leading of a good life, and he did not for a moment believe that justice could be done to the soul of man were injustice being done to his body. Some pretty cottage from the railway train nestled in a delightful spot, and yet within all was black, for it was not to his mind possible to be a God-fearing Christian when a man with his whole family and possibly more were, irrespective of age and sex, crowded into a single small room. Of all men whom this country should wish well of, the one was the builder who put up a decent class of house, for by so doing he was promoting the welfare of man, and in proportion to his work he was deserving of great honour. He hath indeed done a great thing who hath built a good house, and no man was deserving of greater honour. It was a great thing towards people leading self-respecting lives, and living in a good house gave and taught them confidence. On the other hand if there was one man who deserved to be brought within the arm of the law, it was the miscreant who built a rotten house abounding in death traps, and to the speaker's mind that class of man was a dishonour to his generation. The Church in its day had been ready enough to cast men out from its midst for heresy, which was, after all only loose, careless, and inaccurate thinking, but so far as he knew it had done nothing to cope with this shameless and calculating wickedness, and when it did so another era of hope would dawn for it.

A house, however, was only the beginning of the home, there was the furnishing, and if they doubted this he advised them in a moment of absent-mindedness to venture into the domicile of a neighbor. Probably the mistake would be discovered ere they got farther than the hall, and then there would be a hasty retreat. A home should be something more than a house, for it was the complete environment, a life, and by way of a parenthesis he would say that the wholesale building of houses alike in suburban districts tended to destroy the individuality, and led also to a lowering influence of character. But to come back to the furnishing of the house, how foolish and poor-minded people must be who could go and buy the whole of their furniture at once or let the contract to some one to have the home ready and furnished, or who permitted their own home to be an exact reproduction of their neighbour's. It had been his privilege to have been taken over one of the most beautiful homes in England, and the charm of that beautiful place was that the owners had preserved every bit of furniture and article since they commenced life in a humble way as a married couple. The whole house was a record of the

life of its inmates, where every object had a history, every ornament was a treasure of love, and in fact every article a memento which recorded some chapter of life's history. Think for a moment of the books to be found in a house. Did anyone ever give a wholesale order for books. If there were a heathen who did such a thing he deserved never again to have a book. Their books should be bought one by one, it mattered not whether they were first editions or twelfth, but they should be interlined editions of the great authors, edited by their own affections. Then, too, it was awful to contemplate the readiness with which people would leave their houses nowadays, often for no reason at all. Home was home, it mattered not whether it was a six-roomed or a twenty-roomed house, and yet they would ruthlessly fling away the signs and parables of their lives, which it had taken years to accumulate, and he knew of no man who unmoved could contemplate the outward symbols of a former home. Let them now for a few minutes turn to the church home which lay so near their hearts on that inaugural Sunday. Since they were met in that beautiful, well-designed and airy church, he would remind them how important it was that religion should be properly housed, and he would add, if it was important for them who had good homes it was ten times more so for the masses to be met with in the great cities. When in his own city he went into one of the churches of the Roman faith in a poor district, or possibly even in a foreign city, what else could one do but thank God that the poor and needy of the neighbourhood could come into that beautiful building and with the richest indulge in the recollections of their own spiritual history, and their hearts could have full play. But why should not the church of the Puritans be so brightened—a church so illumined with all ties of sacramental love and joy, the repository of memories which searched the very heart, the "bare, wee kirk" which to many became the vestibule of heaven?

To every "bare, wee kirk" there was a sort of spiritual romance which hallowed that ugly old building in Scotland for Scotsmen. He asked them to picture the latter building with its belt of black firs to guard it against the ravages of the winter storm, and the grey stones around which marked the graves of the fathers of the clan. Let them watch the old man going in through the little door to the old-fashioned pew. He remembered sitting there long ago with his father, and had a faint kind of recollection of his grandfather, and the effect produced in him was one of tender memories of those who had gone before. Again he sat there with his own children in the place where his grandfather and father used to sit, and now to-day his children and their children sat there around him, and the church to him was indeed a home full of tenderest memories. Again, let them take a church or chapel down a side street in the great city of London. Why some morning did the business man on his way to work turn off down that side street and stand opposite that grim old and possibly unsightly building. Because a spirit of thankfulness remained in that man. He remembered the time when he was a poor, friendless lad come to London for business, and how one Sunday he stood at the door half afraid to go in. He remembered that kind person who took him to his pew, spoke to him, and afterwards asked him to his house, who surrounded him with good companions and put him in the way of cultured religious society. Later he was married there, and when God gave him children in that building he gave them to the service of Jesus Christ. His mind went back to all these things, and he thanked God that he was ever attracted to that church which, to him, also was indeed a home. It was such thoughts as these which surrounded a church with a spiritual romance, and now they too, in their new building, would be raising up memorials of their love and the affections of their home. A lot of this, it might be argued, was pure sentiment, but still it was a fine thing. Sneered at it often was, and yet supposing they robbed literature of sentiment, what had they left but a bare, repulsive, brutal realism. Let them denude politics of sentiment and there would remain nothing but hard doctrinal theories, and if they removed sentiment from religion they might as well close it at once. Sentiment in this life was everything. Had they ever been in foreign waters where lay a British man-of-war, and had they ever heard its band play "God save the Queen" without feeling the blood run faster through their veins and thinking with pride "I am an Englishman." He would ask those men who sneered at sentiment whether they did not remember and would not always remember where they wooed and won the best woman on earth. If they forgot that they deserve to forget everything. Was there in this country no little God's acre where at least once a year they visited? There were many grander church-yards nearer home perhaps, but there in a secluded spot lay their dead, and did they not visit that spot some Sunday, and as with uncovered head they viewed the sacred spot, had they not made solemn resolutions to live a better life as they thought of those who had gone before. All this might indeed be sentiment, but it was such sentiment as would come with the growth of their church. At present its walls looked new, and although no ivy clustered round them as yet, some day ivy would grow upon their church, within it would be clothed by their affections. The church after all was their home and theirs was the opportunity of making it resound with glad hymns of praise. They came there to this new place of worship from many churches, and were beginning a new church life, and he trusted that it would indeed be their spiritual home.