

## Regular Attendance at Church.

REV. J. A. R. DICKSON, B. D., PH. D. GALT, ONT.

*Written for the Review.*

One of the opportunities of our lives, charged with unspeakable and far-reaching consequences, is that of attendance upon the ordinances of God's house. To a man professing godliness there is no question as to the place the House of God shall hold. That must be a first place. He who really loves Christ will not cast contempt on his appointments. And how many of God's appointments stand closely connected with the House of God? That is central in our life. Our activities flow out of it, and around it, in ever moving streams. Planted as it is in the very heart of the Holy Sabbath it is to men the open fountain in the desert of this life. They go up and drink of its healing waters, and go down again into the valley of the week, girded afresh, encouraged, cheered, and made strong to endure hardness as good soldiers of the cross. Little do thousands think how large a place the House of God fills in their existence. It is one of the largest factors. It is a ministrant of sweet fellowship, noble and pure fellowship, by its society;—of inspiration and hope by its teachings;—of strength and firm resolve by its discoveries of the Hereafter;—of life by its contact with the living God. It spreads its wings over all our lot, and lifts us into the region of the noblest thoughts, the purest motives, the grandest truths and the highest ends the human mind can contemplate. It speaks home to the soul. It stirs the heart. It brings us into the realm of the spiritual, and withholds us from descending into the pit of carnality, and the moral death of materialism. Through it the hand of God is stretched out to help. In it, as God's Word is read, God speaks direct to the conscience rousing up all that is deepest in man. There, man in fellowship with his brother man draws near to God, the Father of our spirits. There God imparts to the humble and contrite heart blessing. In God's House there is a festival for the higher nature. He brings us into his banqueting house and his banner over us is love. As Augustine has said "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our heart is restless till it repose in Thee." We must come to God. Our souls hunger after Him. And because of this the foundations of God's House are laid in the depths of our spiritual nature. There is necessity laid upon us not alone by the Will of God in the Scriptures, but also by the Will of God in our natures to go up to the House of God, and the fellowship of His people, and the enjoyment of the ordinances. And so regular attendance is of prime moment. David regards the desire to God's House a mark of special Divine favor: "Blessed is the man whom thou chooseth and causet to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts. We shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy House even of thy holy temple." He looks on it as his highest honor to be in any way connected with it. "A day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the House of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." An invitation to God's House gladdens Him: "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the House of the Lord." These are indications of a truly godly spirit. They have the right ring in them. But sometimes God's people lose this keen relish for God's House. So that they need this reminder: "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another; and so much the more as ye see the day approaching."

That is in a word: Be regularly in your place in the House of God! Why? Because I. Your own nature, quickened by the Spirit of God; and the Word of God call you there. Not to do, is to deny them both, and thereby violate the promptings of the soul and cast contempt on God's injunctions. It is to be untrue to one's self and to God. And that at once lowers the tone of the life, and depreciates the character. It prepares a man to despise himself. It begins with the proud saying: "It will do me no harm to absent myself from church to-day, I can read my Bible at home, I can have a nice time of quiet worship all alone, I can make out as well by myself." And the actual experience in most cases is that the beautiful vision fades as soon as the small contingent of the

family closes the front door behind them. There is neither reading, nor worship, but a picking up a newspaper or a novel, or a yielding to sleep: and when the worshippers return the absentee is yawning out his unrefreshed condition upon the others. He who being a professed Christian, and able to go to God's House, but does not go, sins against himself, against God and against his neighbor. He damages his own spiritual condition, he does not give to God the honor due unto His holy name, and he declares to his neighbor that regular attendance at God's House is a matter of little consequence.

Because II. You are looked up to as an example. Professing Christians whether they wish it to be so or not, are regarded by non-professors as being better than they are. And they should be. And one mark of their betterness is that they love to frequent the courts of the Lord. They are so regularly there that they may be spoken of as, "Planted in the House of the Lord." Ps. 92. 13. Irregularity in attendance is a public proclamation of disloyalty to Christ. They are serving their own will rather than obeying Christ's. They are giving a bad example to others. They are witnessing against Christ, on the street, in their pew, in their praise and thanksgiving, in their family, in their community, because one of the primary Christian duties is slighted. Instead of holding up the hands of their pastor and encouraging him by their presence, they are doing their best to weaken him and work against him by their absence. And not unlikely these will be the very first to cry out against him if he does not succeed. And they, not he, may be entirely to blame.

If the people support their pastor and co-operate with him every way God will bless them together with the comforts of his grace, and the conquests of His power, and the rich manifestations of His mercy.

Brother, sister, you are to let your light so shine that men may see it, and glorify your Father who is in Heaven! And everytime you go to church you are as marked a man or woman, as if you carried a flambeau in the night. Everytime you sit in your pew in church you are lighting up that spot with a presence that shines like a star. You are witnessing in a four-fold way, of your loyalty to Christ, of your love to His people, of your desire that others might be saved, and you are strengthening the hands and cheering the heart of your pastor. You are even in that a true yoke-fellow; a fellow laborer.

Because III. You shall encourage others to go to the House of God. Seeing you there wet or dry, stormy weather or fine, cold or hot, they will conclude that there must be something worth while that draws you, and they will be tempted to go and see for themselves. You preach of the value of God's House by your conduct. Then it is that you can extend a hearty invitation coupled with a most comforting assurance: "Come thou with us and we will do thee good, for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel." "Come," supposes we ourselves are on the way. An invitation to God's House has led to the Salvation of a Soul. Such was the experience of John Williams the famous missionary to the South Sea Islands. This invitation has been the beginning of new life to many. How can men have faith in Christ unless they hear the Gospel? How can they be warned against sin, encouraged to be holy, and made steadfast in goodness unless they hear the truth of God's Word? To bring one to the church therefore is to do a good work. It is sometimes worth while going just to be able to do this. We are not to live unto ourselves but unto Him who died and rose again.

Because IV. We meet with God there. God is everywhere it is true, but in His House and in His ordinances He discovers Himself as nowhere else. He loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Where'er His people meet there they behold His mercy seat. The Psalmist sings: "Blessed are they that dwell in Thy House, they will be still praising Thee." They have ever new reasons for praise. And their souls are quickened to feel these reasons deeply. So that this Word is true: "Praise waiteth for Thee O God in Zion; and unto Thee shall the vow be performed." To the soul rightly affected by the Divine goodness and desirous of worshipping God the church becomes the House of God and the gate of Heaven.