

ATTENDANCE ON PUBLIC WORSHIP.

GEORGE HERBERT says, in his own quaint way—

Though private prayer be a brave design,
 Yet public hath more promises, more love;
 And love's a weight to hearts, to eyes a sign.
 We all are but cold suitors: let us move
 Where it is warmest. Leave thy six and seven;
 Pray with the most, for where most pray is
 Heaven.

I do not know that it is necessary to enter into any reasoning to prove that attendance on public worship is a duty, because I think that amongst those who have any earnest feeling about religion, there will scarcely be found one who will not shew by his practice that he admits the duty while he rejoices in the privilege. Nevertheless, it may not be amiss to say something concerning the true idea of public service for several reasons, and amongst others for this, that many good people seem to betray defective views upon the subject. In proof of the existence of such defective views, I will adduce two common phrases. In passing a church a person feels a curiosity to know the name of the curate who officiates in it, and accordingly he asks the question thus, "Who preaches there?" Again, going to church is repeatedly spoken of as "going to hear" this clergyman or that. Little phrases like these exhibit in the clearest manner the thoughts which lie beneath; they are phrases founded upon the assumption that the great end, and that which on account of its predominant importance may be taken as expressing the whole purpose, of church-going, is to hear sermons. And it is not uncommon to find persons who both by mouth and by pen support this view; it is sometimes set down, for example, as a distinction between the purposes of the house of God in the Romish Church and in the Church of England respectively, that in the latter the house is a meeting-house, a place of teaching, a religious school, which in the former case it is not, or only in an inferior degree. Now it is not the intention of the writer of this article by any means to disparage the importance of Christian preaching; I believe that the opportunity, which is given to a Christian minister, of instructing the minds and stirring up the hearts of his people from the pulpit, can scarcely be overrated as to its im-

portance; every one who has at all considered the influence which a man is able to produce upon his fellows by that marvellous gift of God, the power of speech, will be persuaded that as long as the world lasts, one great engine of spiritual good will be the public addresses of Christian teachers. Especially will those hold a high view of the importance of preaching, who believe that Christ's ministers really receive a spiritual gift by the laying on of apostolic hands; and nothing can be more foolish or indefensible than for any minister to make light of this part of his office, nor is it easy to believe that any earnest man could be found who would not shrink from the thought. This is no question of peculiar doctrine; whatever views a clergyman may hold within the limits which the Church of England sanctions, a man who is permitted to stand up and exhort his brethren with all the advantages which can be possibly desired,—the certainty of respectful attention, the solemnizing preparatory effect of public prayer, the holy atmosphere of a church, the peace belonging to a Lord's day,—and who does not make use of these advantages for the purpose of warning and exhorting his brethren with all his heart and soul,—what is such a man? Whatever he be, he is strangely unfit for the office which he holds as a minister to his brethren in spiritual things, a watchman for the Church, an ambassador from God, a worker together with Christ.

Magnify preaching however as much as we may, still it is a most imperfect view of public worship to consider it as nearly the same thing as going to hear sermons:

Resort to sermons, but to prayers most:
 Praying's the end of preaching.*

That this has been the tendency in England of late years can hardly be questioned, and there are many persons who little suspect themselves of defective Christian views, who nevertheless do practically regard going to Church as going to hear sermons. It will not be amiss then to put down a few remarks upon what may be considered to be the true idea of public worship; and as it is my special purpose not to be

*George Herbert.