

FREE SEATS AND PEWS.

THE controversy touching the systems of free seated and pew rented churches is not likely to be settled, for there is no acknowledged general principle to which both contestants can appeal. There cannot be any wrong in a number of Christians erecting a church, paying the stipend of a clergyman, meeting all the other charges for divine service, and raising the funds for these outlays by a charge upon the attendants according to the area they severally occupy in such a building. They may be thought somewhat selfish and exclusive in their worship, but such a charge is not always justifiable. Others may erect a church for mission uses, may invite all to enter without any fee, but it is obvious that the expenses of such a place must be met in some systematic manner. Whether the costs of a church then are levied on the basis of the occupancy of a certain area, or are contributed according to some undefined standard, the usual result is that a few liberal persons pay for others who attend divine service without contributing according to any rule, or claim, or their means. That any Church of a mission character must be free is obvious, those who need missions are usually unable to pay the expenses of their own evangelization. There are few so-called free churches that are supported by the offertory, perhaps none. The system of envelopes is introduced in such churches to provide the wardens with an income that can be relied upon, these envelopes are practically a pew rent. Of course, there is no allotment in such churches of one or more particular benches or seats to such contributors, but that is the only real distinction that exists between a Church supported by pew rents and a free Church. It is not, then, the pew rent as a rent that is objectionable to free church advocates, but giving a right of occupancy to certain persons of certain seats. There is evil in this doubtless, the idea of the private proprietorship of a portion of the Temple of God is, in itself, offensive. The name "House of God," is hardly a correct one to apply to a building which is rented in small sections without the Divine proprietor's sanction. There is not a little foolish indignation now and again displayed by persons who take strong ground against pew rents. One would imagine that there was a Scriptural command to build churches, engage clergy, organist, choir, sextons, &c., and to throw them open free to all comers. That in our cities there are thousands who fancy the churches provide "free" services is well-known, for every Sunday night places of worship are crowded by persons who contribute nothing, or only the smallest coin. This is the danger and the weak spot in the free church movement, it is taken advantage of by so many who have just conscience enough to attend worship, but not enough principle to move them to pay for the privilege. Such people have one favorite text, "without money and without price." This passage they believe means that a comfortable seat in a warmed and lighted building is their's whenever they choose

to use it, that a costly service is their's also to enjoy, and that the Gospel is to be preached to them in an attractive style by a highly educated preacher, all free as the air! There needs a bold distinction drawing in churches, one class to be made up of Christians who so love divine service that they are glad to pay its cost, the other class to consist of non-Christians who go to church for fashion's sake, or to dissipate the tedious hours of Sunday. Were this done the pew rent and free seat question would be easily settled by placing the worshippers one side of a church and the mere lounge-attendants on the other. This would mingle social classes thoroughly, for the rich and the poor would be found on both sides of the congregation. There would be no need for pews on either side, as real worshippers care nothing for such marks of proprietorship in God's Temple, and the rest would be too fluctuating to be conveniently so penned up. But while this distinction, although not visible, is an absolute fact, and while such a division would at once reveal that the source of a Church's income is the liberality of worshippers, and not the niggard gifts of Sunday loungers, still, we fear, the suggestion is impracticable. But if Christians and Christians only were allowed to rent pews there would be no outcry about free seats because of the exclusiveness, meanness, selfishness, and ill-manners of pew-holders, for every Christian would rejoice to see the services of the Church crowded by thankful praise-givers, and would gladly share his appropriated area and seats with those less able to secure such privileges. The pew of a Christian is a free seat to his poorer brethren and to strangers.

THE IGNORANCE OR FALSEHOOD OF A NOTORIOUS BOOK.

IN the novel Robert Elsmere, which sets forth an account of the abandonment of his faith by the very poor creature who gives the book its title, the authoress in a score of passages demonstrates her crass ignorance of the questions she flippantly discusses. She gives one the impression of a very smart woman who has heard a good deal of the sceptical talk of clever men on questions which she has only partly understood, never thoroughly studied, and whose phrases after some years she has reproduced in utter ignorance of the questions at issue, and the history of these controversies, of which she has given her readers a shallow and stale version of only one side.

One instance of her utter ignorance, or worse, is exposed by the Dean of Windsor, in the *Contemporary Review* for November. In Robert Elsmere we read, "Westcott, who means so much to the English religious world, first isolates Christianity from all other religious phenomena of the world and then argues upon its details."

Now, this is exactly what Dr. Westcott does not do. In his work "Gospel of the Resurrection," he says, Christianity cannot be regarded alone and isolated from its antecedents.

It is part of a whole which reaches back for two thousand years, it must be placed in intimate connection with the divine discipline of the world in former ages if we are to understand it."

Pray, what must be said of an authoress who tells a glaring untruth like the above? She either knew or did not know of the falsity of her remarks on Dr. Westcott, and either position is a disgraceful one. We have not imagination vigorous enough to fancy any tolerably educated clergyman, abandoning his faith and orders for such re-hashed stuff as the authoress of Robert Elsmere writes. Such an illiterate person is very rarely equal to the task of securing ordination at all. She depicts her sap-brained hero as giving up his Orders and commencing a new religion, which turns out to be nothing but theism touched by modern ideas. The authoress asks us to go into raptures over this new religion as though it were a revelation from Heaven. Our reply is, "stuff and nonsense," the thing is stale to rottenness, we heard that so-called "Gospel" preached fifty years ago, and all the so-called sceptical arguments found in Robert Elsmere were answered, yes, literally demolished, many, many years ago. To those who read, read not an occasional book of a party kind, but read the literature of the day, reviews, Church papers especially, the task of toiling through a book like Robert Elsmere is a severe strain on their patience. Their familiarity with the Strauss and Renan controversies years gone by enables them to see in this novel a very weak presentation of the exploded objections and theories of those writers. To them there is, indeed, a resurrection of the dead in Robert Elsmere, such as that which startled Macbeth, they see the victim of Christian apologists risen with all the gashes of logical swords on the spectre, and wonder why being once slain it should revisit the glimpses of the moon. We have no fears about such literature, it is very hard reading, there is not a gleam of genius in the book, not a touch of humour, not a trace of dramatic power. Its scepticism will delight some fools, but against any intelligent faith it will be as rain pelting walls of granite! It will be said of many comments on this notorious book, that they are not replies to it. That is quite true. Against arguments, arguments can be used in reply, but from cover to cover we have read without getting on the track of any form of real argument in Robert Elsmere. There is a good deal of pompous sceptical assertion, very flippant in its shallowness. The book is ephemeral, in a few months it will be as dead as those authors of whose infidel objections this book is largely a re-hash. Mr. Gladstone, whose judgment on such a question no one will doubt, declares that, "in Robert Elsmere there is not a sign that the authoress has made herself acquainted with the Christian apologists, old or recent, or has weighed the evidences of Christian history."

Such ignorance amounts to dishonor.

—Economy is of itself a great revenue.—
Cicero.