

## WHAT KEEPS MEN FROM CHURCH.

BY THE REV. ED. RANSFORD.

SOME time ago, the *Record* and the *Rock*, as to whose anti-ritualistic proclivities there can be no doubt, advocated the non-prosecution of those clergy whose extreme ritual seemed to many to go beyond what was allowed by the Anglican Church. Of those who favor their views, not a few have likewise adopted surpliced choirs and choral services, have abandoned the use of the black gown in the pulpit, and even gone so far as to take the eastward position during the Prayer of Consecration in the Eucharistic Service. Not a generation ago, such practices stirred up the St. Barnabas riots and prosecutions, and still more recently the troubles at St. Georges-in-the-East, London. Experience, however, has proved that Popery is not tied to such ceremonies, and that the Scarlet Woman does not propagate her doctrines by means of chanted psalms or white-robed choristers.

Yet there is no question as to the fact that an over-elaborate ritual acts as a deterrent to some men—as opposed to women—from attending the services of the Church, and, as the *Church Times* recently affirmed, is a "possible, though not very usual cause" of such abstention on the part of the male sex. The *Church Times*, while fearing that such a statement may "possibly scandalize" a few of its readers, reminds them that the "ceremonies of the Roman Church has nearly everywhere caused, or has been coincident with the alienation of the men—at all events among the educated classes. The English people have a great appreciation of whatever helps to give warmth or meaning to corporate worship. A broad, dignified, and easily intelligible ritual is as much valued as congregational singing; but a ritual which is confined to the chancel, and which the ordinary worshipper can neither share nor understand, is as little likely to be popular as elaborate anthems, or music which is confined to the choir."

This would seem to point to a change of front, in order that the needs and necessities of every soul in the Church may be catered to. Fifteen years ago, one of the chief advocates of an elaborate "ritual," the Rev. Dr. R. F. Little-dale, branded as "besotted folly" the non-utilization of painting, and light and music, as "necessary adjuncts" to worship; and the argument has constantly been adduced that extreme ritual has been forced upon the clergy by the congregation, whose freedom and aspirations in the matter of the conduct of the services, forms the one thing to be considered by the priests of the Churches concerned.

To adopt an ornate ritual, its extreme upholders urge, is to make use of an evangelistic agency, which is so powerful in bringing souls to the truth that none can afford to ignore it. If no other reason can be brought forward for its employment, the mere fact that such a ritual attracts men to the churches and empties the low halls and public houses, where music and light draw crowds of men and boys to

their spiritual and physical ruin, is too potent to be ignored. Dr. Little-dale then agreed as follows:—"The fact is seized on by secular bodies, whose aim is to gather as many members as possible from the lower orders. Societies like the Odd Fellows and the Foresters find the ordinary routine of business meetings, even though directly beneficial to their members, insufficient to secure cohesion, and consequently elaborate processions, with badges, music, and banners, are found useful appliances for attracting members and keeping them together, and it is said that their ritual at their private meetings is attended with even more pomp than that which they exhibit to the public gaze; and there is reason to believe that the abandonment of such usages would lead to the collapse of any such society which should determine to go in for simplicity."

This distinctive principle has been successfully laid hold of by various religious and quasi-religious societies, such as the Salvation Army, the Blue Riband Association, and the like, and have thus borne witness to both the rationalness and the workableness of the theory—further testimony being afforded by the complete revolution in practice inaugurated by the non-advanced party in the Church of England, and endorsed, as already remarked, by its organs, the *Rock* and the *Record*.

On the part of the *Church Times*, however, and those who belong to its school of thought, there has really been no change of front. From the very first, the paper, its conductors and supporters, including Dr. Little-dale himself—that is, all the healthier and wiser portion of the advanced party in the Church, have ever opposed all Romanizing ritual, and vigorously set their face against whatever savored either of "Papal Mass in Masquerade," or of the new fangledness of the Romish ceremonial. They understood that no men of ordinary intelligence would care to be present at a service moulded on lines repugnant to the Anglo-Saxon mind—a service full of novelties and pointing to innovations in dogma, which form no portion of the Catholic Faith, and, as such, have neither part nor lot in the Liturgy or formularies of the Anglican Church. To this was counteradded the knowledge that, as the over-ornate and oftentimes meaningless ritual of the Roman Church, speaking as it does, of the accretions of Vaticanism and its attendant evils of mind-enslavement, repelled the full-grown male intelligence of other nations, so it will doubly repel that of the English people. It is, therefore, reasonable that, while the one party has discovered that bald Puritanic simplicity so-called—in reality robbing God of the reverence which is His due, does not tend to popularize the Church and her services, so the other, some of whose members have erred by excess, must lop off the superfluities in their ritual, while their brethren add to what they have hitherto avowed as tending Romeward. Each being determined to compel men to come in, so that God's house shall be full, has resolved on and advocated the adoption of a system of levelling up and levelling down, so that both shall meet on a common grade,

and thus evangelize the majority. In each case the cause of Christ will be served by the increase of reverence and dignity on the one hand, and by the intelligent and intelligible ritual offered to the worshipper on the other. Nor will any doctrinal teaching suffer thereby, nor will the faith of Catholics be diminished in the slightest degree by the disuse of obsolete, incorrect, meaningless, and superfluous ceremonies, which point not to truth but to error. In the beginning of the grand upward movement inaugurated by the writers of the "Tracts for the Times," the highest point in ritualism was thought to have been reached, when men had a choral service and preached in their surplice, when churches became a little more churchly in appearance, and when, at the outside, two candlesticks with candles, and, perhaps a cross, were placed on the Altar, but the Catholic doctrine taught was at least as strongly enunciated then as now, and though the ritual was meagre enough, the trumpet of dogma gave forth no uncertain sound. The candles, indeed, stood unlit—were probably absent from the Altar; the cross was almost an unknown ornament; flowers never decked God's Board; but the doctrine of the Real Presence was none the less diligently inculcated, and none the less implicitly believed. Holy Baptism might be administered out of an earthenware bowl; but none the less explicitly were men taught the regeneration of infants by the affusion of the water in the Triune name. A bishop, such as Dr. Philpots, of Exeter, or Dr. Wilberforce, of Oxford, wore no cope nor bore a pastoral crook, but nevertheless he believed himself to be, and was held up to the faithful as the successor of the Apostles. Over the priest's shoulders there hung no violet or other stole save one of black, but that did not prevent him from proclaiming himself as the minister of Absolution—to whom was entrusted the awful commission of remitting and retaining sins, and of offering up the Eucharistic Sacrifice for a continual remembrance of Him Who gave him through His Apostles, the power of consecrating and offering the Body and Blood of Christ. The cross might not be visible at every turn in window or on finial, but the preaching of the cross was not one whit less foolishness and a rock of offense to the non-Churchman and the unbeliever of those days, than it is to those of our own time. Archdeacon Denison and Mr. Bennet, of Frome, were prosecuted, and Dr. Pusey was censured by Oxford University, not for extreme ritual, but for what was then thought by some to be extreme sacramental—even Romish doctrine on the subject of the Holy Eucharist. They were acquitted and their teaching endorsed, so far as the State could endorse any theological doctrine as the teaching and doctrine of the Church, while Mr. Mackonochie, Mr. Purchas and others, suffered in pocket and in person, in some instances were placed under ecclesiastical censure for persevering in a ritual which, though not being "understood of the people," alienated many from the Church; and so these men did more harm to souls that good. It is clear