

THE SHEPHERD AND HIS FLOCK

VOGUE, a secular journal, may not have keen spiritual vision, but it surely sees some earthly things rationally, as the following extract clearly proves: –

"Although the masculine non-church goer has for a long time attracted the disapproving attention of Church writers as well as of a large number of the clergy, who have sternly rebuked him from the pulpit, he stubbornly continues to pursue the even tenor of his way. And worse than this, whereas in days gone by he alone was to any great extent open to the charge of backsliding in such respect, of late years his wife and daughter in increasing numbers have taken to omitting regular church attendance, and that without the least loss of caste, except, perhaps, in small, conservative communities.

"Why is it that men and women who not only lead respectable lives, but who devote much of the time they can spare from the most pressing personal claims to what are incontestably good works, are today so frequently to be counted among those who habitually absent themselves from divine service? This is the question over which many good parsons are in despair, and it is but natural that they should be, for between their concern for the souls of their communities, and the prospect of being left without employment, they have much to worry them. It is also the question that is perplexing church councils, which are at their wit's end to devise methods of persuading (coercion being no longer permissible in the Protestant communion, at least) people to come back into the fold. But in spite of all the perturbation and efforts at reform on the part of the religious agencies of the age, the number of the non-church goers keeps on increasing at a rate alarming to those who regard

Sunday observation, according to ecclesiastical formula, as the only test of character, and the only hope of salvation.

"Perceiving the trouble churches are in over the drifting [R4582 : page 101] away of their congregations, ex-President Eliot, of Harvard, not long ago submitted to an interested world his plan of a new religion, but although it was cordially received by the public, the ecclesiastics would have none of it. The projected system failed to provide for any phase of current ecclesiasticism, including the ministerial office, mysticism and the like, and, therefore it is not surprising that they frowned upon it, and refused to permit it Christian sanction. But whether the Protestant leaders like it or not, the only hope of winning the majority of those who have forsaken the Church back to affiliation with religious groups is the reduction of Church system, as nearly as practicable, to the two principles – Love Thy God With All Thy Heart and Thy Neighbor As Thyself. In spite of ecclesiasticism the more enlightened classes are already engaged in conjuring out in a myriad practical ways the command of neighborly love, and it is only by a convincing presentation of the claim of God upon the loyalty of the race, that the majority of the unchurched can be made to include that also in their creed of life.

"The right of private judgment – fought for and won centuries ago – is what is now being exercised by the non-church-goer, and what he asks of the ethical leader is not high-priced choirs to discourse glorious harmonies, or sacerdotal vaudeville of any kind. These aids to crowd-drawing do not touch the core of the matter. His demands are more serious and fundamental, for he believes that the hour has come when the Church must go back to the Master, and seek from him a new interpretation that shall fit the requirements of this age."

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