

## Proclamations and Intimations.

INTIMATIONS at time of public service are a necessity, but they are a troublesome necessity. Banns must be published, edicts read, the Session summoned, meetings appointed; and this, by the nature of the case, in full Ecclesia. But there is thereby distraction; the question is at what point the distraction may be least felt. That it is felt is plain, from the variety in placing of them with which ministers experiment. The older custom, before "improvement of worship" introduced confusion, was to make intimations (but not publishing of banns) at the close of service, before collection and Benediction. This was well enough so long as intimations were few; but it put them at a point when people are weary of attending, and at which to do more than barely intimate is difficult. As Church life grew more active, there was often occasion to expand intimations into explanation or exhortation; bare intimation did not suffice, and a better place for the notices came to be sought. As to the best place, opinions evidently have differed.

The same objections seem to apply to placing them either at the beginning or at the end of service. *Medio tutissimus ibis*, and the most obvious position for notices and the making of them is immediately before sermon. This by old and widely followed custom is the time allotted to them; and such custom generally in matters indifferent represents long experience, and should not be lightly disregarded. At that point in service there is in any case a change of mental attitude in minister and flock. Adoration and supplication are about to give place to instruction. The congregation have been (let us hope) active worshippers—now they assume the posture of hearers. The minister at their head has been occupied with God; now he turns to them to speak with them; he has to declare to them the everlasting Gospel. But he has also some domestic matters, things incidental to the day, of which in his pastoral capacity he has to communicate with his people. Let him deal with these and get them out of the way, that they may not afterwards obtrude, bringing us down from the great things of which he is next to speak,

to think of emergent trivialities. Devout people (and there are many of them) would prefer to leave church with undisturbed impression of spiritual matters, rather than with information as to a tea meeting as their minister's last word to them.

Intimations before sermon can be made, if need be, with some deliberation and fulness. People have then settled to listen. The sermon may have to be the shorter if notices have been lengthy; but short sermons do not lead to grumbles, and in compensation some useful preaching can be done under the guise of "intimating." Intimations then made can be made either from the steps of the chancel on the way to the pulpit (which is possibly the better way), or from the pulpit itself before the text is announced, and, if prayer before sermon is used, before that prayer. It may be added that the pulpit is not an advertising station for the convenience of the public: a waste-paper basket is a necessary part of vestry furniture; and also that the excessive detail of even congregational notices may require judicious pruning with due regard to the dignity of Divine worship.

There is, however, one kind of notice to which what is said above does not apply—namely, banns of marriage. Publications of banns is not merely an intimation, nor merely a legal formality; it is the first step to the solemnisation of the marriage, in a sense part of the marriage service, and parallel with the demand for objections usually made at the commencement of that service. It is not to be treated as a technical obligation, but as righteous necessity. The Church has always claimed an interest in the purpose of any of its members to marry, and has asserted its right to judge what unions it may in God's name bless and what it cannot, and also to exercise an advisory influence regarding such purposes.<sup>1</sup> The publication of banns has been for very long the customary expression of this claim, and the evidence of the Church's concern for the purity of marriage. Banns have, therefore, been treated as a separate matter.<sup>2</sup> Our Church law takes no account of intimations in the general sense; but there are Acts of Assembly (1690 VII., and 1699 V.) appointing for banns their place—namely, immediately

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. vii. 39; Ignatius, *Ep. to Polycarp*, V. iii. 4; Tertullian, *Ad Uxor.* ii. 8.

<sup>2</sup> The Church of England, for example, directs them to be published at Morning Service immediately after the Second Lesson, other Notices after the Creed in the Service for Holy Communion.

before Divine worship in the forenoon. Some must still remember how these Acts were till recent days observed, the Session Clerk (as is lawful, if by resolution of Session) proclaiming them from the "lettern" after the church bell had stopped and before the minister entered—once the minister had entered, publication became *his* duty. The law in this matter, it is suggested, ought to be obeyed. Desuetude in the matter is not complete, and return to obedience would be easy.

The late Dr Playfair of St Andrews, a man of wisdom and knowledge, always made publication a separate act, taking it from the pulpit before sermon, but intimations at another point in service; he said that publication of banns was too important to be grouped with notices generally. They should be read with at least as much care as ordinary instructions, and with the scheduled indication of parties by their residence, as the responsible Session Clerk has given them to the officiant—the mere recitation of names does not designate. Invocation of the Divine blessing on marriages purposed is, to say the least, premature, as following on what is done to elicit objection, if such should exist, and to ascertain whether at a later stage the Church may so pray. Further, the proclamation of intention to marry being a step in the process of marriage, that step should not be taken except in the case of a marriage which the minister making or sanctioning the proclamation would himself be free in conscience to solemnise.

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