

MR. REYNOLDS—Another thing I would like to point out is the need of halls for the use of young people of the poorer class for social gatherings. Outside of the halls of the Educational Alliance and of the University Settlement, there is not a social hall on the lower east side which can be hired for such purposes that has not a bar connected with it. The churches could overcome this difficulty by providing halls in which these young people might dance. I should be in favor of church dance-halls.

DR. DE C. STA—You would degrade yourselves simply to fill your house.

MR. REYNOLDS—In the University Settlement Building there is a hall for dancing. Not only are there no evil results from these dances, but many young people are brought to us through the dance hall whom we could not reach otherwise.

DR. RAINSFORD—If I had the money I would build a great social hall on the lower east side and I would have a soft drink bar in connection with it.

DR. DE COSTA—The trouble is with all discussions of this kind that there is no recognition of anything but dead Protestantism. They ask why don't people go to church? They never ask why Catholics do go to church. The largest religious body in the land is ignored. Catholics do not need to fill their churches by starting libraries or clubs, though they have plenty of them, together with all the social attractions known, as a usual thing. But their churches are crowded all the same where they do not exist. Catholics do not need attractions. They go to church from a sense of duty.

DR. CADMAN—Catholics do not go to church from a sense of duty, but of fear.

DR. DE COSTA—The Catholic congregations speak for themselves. Of nine crowded services at the Church of St. Francis Xavier on Sunday morning only one has any regular sermon or any music whatever. Catholics need no sermons or music. If Mr. Coler would go to school to Catholics for a Sunday or two he would change his statement. The fact is that the people are tired of Protestantism, and the promise of fans and ice-water, together with the other matters, does not move them. You must have the Mass for the masses.

DR. CADMAN—That is not strictly true. The constant tide of Catholic immigration into this country scarcely supplies the loss brought about by the indifference of the second and third generations of Roman Catholics born in the country, who, through American influences, revolt against the simple faith of their parents, finding it in a haphazard and half-hearted way.

There are some good suggestions in this discussion, but unquestionably the chief objection to making more use, and especially more educational use, of the church buildings is the fact that the preachers themselves are but very ill-trained, as a rule, to become teachers of really useful knowledge, and can only evade unpleasant comparisons and dangerous discussion by keeping their churches closed against rational and scientific teachers and maintaining the "sacred" character of their bricks and mortar and organ-pipes. As Dr. Rainsford said, men who have "given evidence of a desire to serve the community and uphold the truth" might be acceptable, but it is evident from this and other remarks that the leading idea of all these men is, not how to make the church serve the masses, but how to make the masses serve the church,—how to get the masses into the church while still maintaining that worn-out theology insistence upon which has led to their withdrawal and indifference? Even Commissioner of Charities J. W. Keller thinks it impossible to desecrate the church buildings by having an occasional entertainment in them. Evidently he believes in sanctified blocks of wood and stone. Dr. Rainsford is one of the most liberal of the preachers, but even he looks upon the amusements he has provided as only so many sprats given as baits to catch herrings for the orthodox net.

Dr. De Costa's explanation, adopting Comptroller

Coler's sapient expression, forms as bad an indictment of the church as could be imagined. His logic is of an essentially ministerial character. The churches are away from the people because the people are away from the churches! This may be called trenchant criticism—for a parson. But he says the reason the people stay away is due to the fact that "hard social conditions give no time for them to draw near." Now, if this were true—and the evidence of some of the other speakers shows very clearly that it is false, for we are told that the people prefer lodge rooms and music halls with bars attached to the attractions of the church—if it were true that the "hard social conditions" kept them away from the church, the fact would prove conclusively that the church had failed in its mission. Instead of "drawing all men" to the "uplifted Christ," it has driven them or allowed them to fall into the clutches of the saloon-keeper. What sort of salvation is this? The fact is, the only salvation offered by the church is that secured by the preachers.

It is amusing to note that Dr. De Costa thinks Comptroller Coler knows nothing about the churches, while Dr. Cadman says Mr. Coler has simply called for what in his case has proved an immensely successful plan. It is certain that, to a large extent, the people are still attracted by a man who can put energy and spice into his expositions of the most diabolical doctrines, and this is proved by such cases as those of Spurgeon, Talmage, Sam Jones, etc.

In speaking of the Catholics, in our opinion Dr. De Costa perhaps innocently hits the truth. Catholics are more loyal to their church than Protestants. Without being very much more intelligent than the Catholic, the Protestant has heard a few things that prevent him from being so deeply hypnotized by his priest as the Catholic, and as he cannot be easily reached by clerical anathemas, he naturally more easily drops away from the ministrations of an unattractive preacher.

Certainly, as Ballington Booth said, opening churches on week evenings would attract many people; and it is on this line that we think Freethinkers might well take a lesson, if they feel an incentive to do their full share towards elevating their less-favored fellow men. If a few wealthy Freethinkers in each town would buy a church or put up a suitable building, open it with a well-stocked library and reading room and ordinary club arrangements, give lectures and entertainments during the week, and open the rooms on Sunday as well, without making a feature of anti-Christian propagandism, we think the experiment could not fail of success, and would compel many of the churches to adopt a somewhat similar plan. It has been objected to such a plan, that a scheme to be permanently successful must be self-supporting, and possibly such a condition must be accepted as legitimate; but certainly no great movements in the moral and religious fields have ever been started without great self-sacrifices, and what is wanted to-day is an example the success of which would lead to the adoption of a similar plan by the more liberal churches, and thus render the continuance of the example no longer necessary. But it could not be carried out without considerable expense and work, the burden of which—as even in the older institutions—must of necessity fall upon a few shoulders. What we aim at is a really free Sunday, and though it may be coming, the progress it is making is extremely slow, and would be wonderfully hastened by such an example as that of which we have spoken, and which could be easily furnished by the Freethinkers in any of the large towns in Canada.