

## AN INSTITUTIONAL CHURCH.

“THE Open or Institutional Church ” represents an attempt to solve the problem : How to reach the masses. Its aim is to bridge the chasm which yawns between the Church and “ the people ”—a breach which, like that between capital and labor, has been widening year by year. The tendency of the churches has been steadily in the “ up-town ” direction; and an empty church with locked doors, standing in a congested district, is not an unknown thing even in a New England city. The poor have not had the gospel preached to them; religion has been becoming more and more the luxury of Dives. Earnest minds have set about devising some remedy for the evil. Something must be done, and that right early. If the churches which employ conventional methods cannot adapt themselves to their changing environment, so as to be able to survive the moving away of their families, then new methods must be adopted. If the masses cannot be reached by the ordinary means of grace, then we must use the extraordinary.

This is just what the Institutional Church seeks to do. It aims to “ save all men and all of the man by all means.” It knows nothing of the old-time distinction between the religious and the secular. It recognizes the function of the Church to minister to all the legitimate needs—physical, intellectual, social, as well as spiritual—of the community in which it exists; and emphasizes the necessity of its modes of activity being accommodated to the peculiar needs of any particular community. It believes in the mission of the church to provide that material environment in which may be realized the spirit of Christ. “ Ministration through adaptation ” is its key-note. In the words of one of its champions, “ it begins with men just as it finds them, meets the needs of which they are conscious, and so generally leads them to be conscious of new needs higher and nobler.” If a man is hungry, it does not offer him a religious tract, but gives him a meal; and thus he is in a fitter state to receive religious impressions. To boys who want to play “ nine-pins,” it does not say “ Let us pray,” but it provides for them a bowling alley, through which they generally find their way to the prayer meeting or Sunday-school. And all this within the walls of the church itself. It is no stickler for ecclesiastical proprieties. It is nothing if not unconventional. It sanctifies all means for the saving of the world for Christ. It thus stands for the endeavor of the church to exert a continuous influence on the whole life of man. What differentiates it from the conventional church is just this—that it keeps its doors open every day and all the day, with all that this involves. Parlors, baths, amusement