

position socially and intellectually, either have very mistaken ideas as to the style of reading which is best calculated to bring out the meaning of a passage and to arrest and hold the attention of their hearers, or they have in the multiplicity of their studies neglected to cultivate the art of simple but expressive reading. But if lay helpers could do nothing else, they might often act as a buffer between minister and people in the little disputes which so often arise. Reasoning from analogy, the use of such an advisory parish board must be apparent to any one, though the full measure of its importance and usefulness can be appreciated only by those who have fairly tried the experiment in some form. One most useful function they could perform, the consideration and settlement—under the clergyman—of all the unimportant trifles which a difference of opinion or habit commonly brings into undue prominence and not seldom converts into a *casus belli*. In all matters of absolute right or wrong, in matters of faith and doctrine, let our clergy set their faces as flint, and unyieldingly do their duty as stewards of the mysteries of God, to whom alone they are responsible. But in unimportant matters, the priest of a parish who wishes to make his ministry wise, long and beneficent, will largely subordinate himself, will meet the views not alone of the majority of his congregation, but sometimes also of the opposing minority, that each may recognize that the other may be equally, or at least partially right, and, learning the lesson that truth, though one, is many-sided, may adopt as their final rule and guide the principle which would lull into peace and harmony the most widely differing and discordant elements within a parish. "In necessariis unitas, in non-necessariis libertas, in omnibus caritas"—the charity that is not puffed up, that suffereth long and is kind, that thinketh no evil, the feeble human echo and reflection of Him who is Himself love eternal, to preach and teach whom is the sacred mission of His Bride, our most holy Church.]

CHURCH SOCIAL GATHERINGS.

BY R. M. DENNISTOUN, ESQ., PETERBOROUGH.

Man is a gregarious animal and social gatherings are natural to him. Association with his fellow man cheers, stimulates, encourages and entertains him. The world would be a sorry place if all men lived like hermits, and the Church would resemble a Trappist Monastery if each did his allotted task without reference to his neighbour. The subject "Church Social Gatherings" has been thoroughly discussed of late. Papers were read at the recent Conference in Toronto which leave little to be said. The able and eloquent address of the Bishop of Huron is still in our memories, and the practical reasons which he gave for the gathering together of Christian people in a social way cannot be gainsaid. It is a good thing, he remarked, "for the man going up in the world to meet occasionally the man coming down." It is a good thing, we may add, for the rich and poor to mingle together as members of one family, and to feel that the shallow distinctions which separate them are for time only and not for eternity. It is anomalous that we hope and pray to spend eternity with people whom we do not care to notice in this world. Class distinctions are, I take it, the greatest hindrance which the clergy have to deal with, especially in the towns and cities. It seems impossible to overcome them. There is a certain amount of dignified condescension on the part of one-half the congregation towards the other half when they meet in the school-house, but the greatest indifference when they meet in the street. And such things as social gatherings in the home are confined to certain carefully restricted circles or sets which are abso-

lutely fixed, and as unbending as the laws of the Medes and Persians. There is much to justify this. In the first place the ordinary head of a family cannot open his house to more than a limited number of persons. He naturally seeks people of congenial tastes and habits. Education and good manners have more to do with the adjustment of social classes in Canada than either birth or wealth. People thus know some of their fellow Churchmen well, others indifferently, and many not at all. The result is that when brought together at some Church social gathering we find the customs of the world outside all tend to emphasize the absence of that theoretical equality which should exist at the present day. There is but one remedy for this. It lies not in forcing the people together, or expecting a very great deal of cordiality in mixed crowds. It is in causing them to realize their common destiny and brotherhood in Christ which alone brings all men to their true level. Let those who have anything to give help and sustain the poor by liberal offerings for the alleviation of distress and want, and let the poor recognize in their more fortunate brethren the kindly Christian charity which shows itself in tangible form when necessity demands it. When the spirit of co-operation and mutual assistance is abroad in a congregation, the heaviest danger is removed from our Church social gatherings. We need not aim to ignore social distinctions where they really exist, but to eradicate pride and selfishness on the one hand, and envy and jealousy on the other hand, so that the people may feel that down underneath there is a substantial foundation on which all may firmly stand. That as in the material structure of the church there is foundation stone and lofty pillar, crypt, nave, choir and dome, so in the spiritual Church there is a place for every man, each differing in honour or degree, but all necessary to a perfect building. The form which our Church social gatherings may be permitted to take is a much debated problem. There is great diversity of opinion. It seems that the clergy of each parish are a law unto themselves on this point, just as the laymen on their part seem to be a law unto themselves as to what they may, can or ought to do, under all conceivable circumstances. With all due respect, I submit there is too much deference paid to individual conscience in our Church of England. It is the court of last resort from which there is no appeal in practice, if not in theory. While we have avoided the slavery of Rome, with its one will, one voice, one action, we have set up a far more dangerous tribunal—the absolute independence of the individual—and the result has not been conducive to uniformity or harmony. The disciplinary powers which are the prerogatives of our bishops and clergy are rarely if ever called into operation. Every man may conduct himself as he chooses, criticize his bishop or his clergy, decline to observe this or that mandate just as he pleases, and no consequences follow. This digression may appear at first to have nothing to do with the subject in hand. It, however, deals with a weakness which affects all our parish affairs. Our bishops, nay, even our archdeacons, are seen but seldom, and then only to exercise those episcopal or archidiaconal functions which pertain to the spiritual side of their offices, and not to supervise or direct more temporal affairs. The point which I wish to make is this: There should be certain well defined lines on which all Church social gatherings should be conducted, promulgated by authority and unquestionable; this would simplify the problem usually. To my mind the ordinary social gathering, which is only a replica of those to which the world is accustomed, is a failure. The world is an adept at social gatherings. If amusement is the thing sought for, our people will find it for themselves without the assistance of the Church. What, then, has the Church to offer? In contemplating this point do we not too frequently begin at the wrong end? I read papers upon how much a man may bet at cards and yet be a Christian, how much he may drink and yet be a Christian, what bazaars or lotteries, or theatrical performances are lawful, how near we may sail to the wind in this or that particular without imperiling salvation. This seems to me a very fruitless discussion. If these things are to be regulated, let it be done by the House of

Bishops or the General Synod, and not bandied here and there by every stump speaker, with the result that the ordinary layman is given to understand that there is no line drawn anywhere, and that he may do as he likes. Let us agree, if possible, to contemplate that which is high and not that which is low. There are some things we are sure about; let us hold them fast and we cannot fall into error. Without fear of contradiction, I say that the best form of a Christian social gathering is the assembling together in the church or in the home for prayer, praise, thanksgiving and almsgiving. The common worship of Almighty God brings men near together, levels pride, stimulates to kindly acts, loosens the purse strings and elevates true and humble merit more completely than any other gathering can possibly do. Objects such as these must be the central motive round which our gatherings are to revolve. It is of little use to bring the people together for the sole purpose of allowing them to entertain each other. They can do that better in other places. Disappointment and want of progress are the result. Our Young People's societies founded on this basis have been a failure. Do not seek to hold the people by coaxing them and catering to their capacity for amusement. Give them work to do of a distinctly Church character. Our Women's Auxiliaries, Chancel Guilds, Brotherhoods of St. Andrew, Kings' Daughters, Building Committees, have been grand successes, because each has taken up a definite line of action into which the workers can plunge with their whole souls, feeling that their labours and prayers are joined for a common purpose. Would it not be better to give to every Church social gathering as its immediate and direct object the pushing forward of the active work of the Church in some special department. As far as possible let these meetings be of a devotional character in whole or in part. Fear not to offend any casual visitor by doing what would certainly be done if only our own people were present. When the people come together let them feel that the meeting is for a definite purpose; and when they disperse let them realize that some progress has been made. While our subject apparently restricts us to the shadow of the sacred edifice itself, nevertheless it seems to me most advisable to bring the influence of the Church to bear directly upon the outside gatherings of the people. This may only be done by the closer association of the clergy with their congregations. There should be no entertainments to which the clergy are not invited—nay more, there are many entertainments to which they are now invited, but which it is well understood they will not attend. I know the multifarious duties which now fall upon the hard worked clergyman, and his disinclination to add to the many peremptory calls upon his time which now press upon him. I do not advocate that he should become a society man in the sense in which the term is generally applied, but with great respect I suggest that what he cannot occasionally commend by his presence he should be prepared to denounce as either harmful or inexpedient. I have heard it argued that a clergyman is out of place at a dance or a smoking concert—that it shows a want of seriousness, a lack of conviction, a want of sympathy—that the duties of a priest which bring him into contact with the sick and dying, which mark him as a man set apart for holy things, cannot consistently lead him into paths trodden by the gay butterflies of fashion or pleasure. I am not so sure of this. I do not advocate that the priest should either dance at the ball, or sing, or even smoke at the concert. He need but be present occasionally to give a kindly word or look, or an approving smile to those of his flock by whom he is surrounded. His presence will check that which might be unseemly—will restrain all tendency to excess, and will purify and render harmless many things which might be dangerous in his absence. I have known two of our clergy attend a ball in an hotel, and though the fact provoked criticism at the time, it was universally conceded that their presence entirely removed the danger to some of our young men from such questionable surroundings. By abstaining from participating in many gatherings, harmless in themselves, the clergy widen the breach between Church and people. While the clergy strive to draw the peo-