

THE AU'PZE or LOVE FEAST.

(Mr. E. Nicholls, Vancouver.)

These feasts, as the Catacombs of Rome reveal, were celebrated by the early Christians. The rich, if such there were, and the poor, met together; they partook of a common meal in token of brotherhood, and rendered to each their mutual help. These institutions seem to have been lost sight of and discontinued until the advent of the Wesleys. They were then revived and played no unimportant part in laying the foundations of the Methodist church. Long ago, when the Methodists were few in number, many of them despised and persecuted, it was grand to meet together for counsel and help. In those early days the pretty village of St. Auburn was a centre towards which farmers and their wives, both on the same horse, and all sorts of country folk came. Religious exercises occupied the day, but the afternoon was the great feast. These meetings were often led by men of splendid talents, the Wesleys, Adam Clarke and others took their turn. The people sang the finest hymns in the English language, such as "Jesus, Lover of My Soul," "The God of Abraham Praise," and others, composed by the Wesleys and their preachers. These grand hymns, though at first proscribed, are now sung in all the churches and cathedrals in the land and throughout the world. Prayers, eloquent on account of their fervor and simplicity, were offered. The meal consisted of bread and water, of which all partook, then a collection for the widows and the Lord's poor. These preliminaries through, there followed a relating of experience; any who felt moved to speak did so without fear of criticism. It is true wisdom and knowledge was not always manifest, but the mantle of charity covered them all, the tie that bound the people together was strong.

These experiences were often rich and rare; there was always refreshing individuality and kindly warmth of a genuine enthusiasm. The compiler of these lines was taken, when a lad, to these meetings, and he remembers to this day some of the testimonies.

Old Father Jonathan was the village cobbler; he had seen seventy-nine summers; his flowing locks were as white as the driven snow, and his face was serene and bright. When he stood up to speak there was profound silence as if to catch the last accents of a voice that in the course of nature would soon be hushed. Looking around on the audience, his lips quivering with emotion, he said: "Dear friends, I have tried to serve my Lord for forty years, I know it has been imperfect, but it grows more pleasant as the days go by, and now at eventide it is light. Religion is the best thing for this life and the life that is to come."

"It makes the rough paths of peevish nature even."

And opens in the breast a little heaven."

"I am waiting until my change shall come; It will come soon," and it did.

The next to rise was Michael Vener, clapping his hands for joy, he said: "Friends, I want to praise the Lord for a great deliverance. As many of you have heard, I was down in a mine and had tamped a hole, when the fuse accidentally caught fire and it could not be stopped, and there was just three minutes to live, so I thought there were two of us, and one at the top, but this man

could only pull up one at a time, so I let the other man go up. He had a family and I had none. I knelt down in a corner of the shaft, put a board over my head, and committed my soul to God, and then there was an explosion like thunder, but dear me! I was not a bit hurt, and I was not a bit frightened. It seems to me I was safe as if I had been in the Squire's parlor. Come," said he, "let us sing my favorite hymn."

"Our souls are in His mighty hand,

And he shall keep them still;

And you and I shall surely stand

With Him on Zion's Hill.

Oh, that will be joyful, etc."

Bartholomew Barton was the next to rise. He was a Cornish miner and had lost an eye in an explosion. Said he: "I hear people sometimes say at these meetings their faces are towards Zion,

and almost every sin that can be committed by man." "Hear, hear," said Richard. "I was going to add," said Samuel, "if Richard had not stopped me, all except murder, and I may do that yet." "Hear, hear," said Richard, whereupon Samuel got a little angry. In fact he did not really mean all that he had said, and turning his face to Richard he said: "It seems Richard Curnew thinks I am a very bad man, but I am as good as he is any day. This was said with much warmth, and the minister thought it time to interfere. He gave out and they all sang "Come sinners to the gospel feast."

William Locke had been a fine lay preacher, but he had got into trouble, and had really fallen away, and ceased to be a member for a couple of years. Poor William had come back penitent and



REV. J. P. HICKS.

now I would like to know in what direction their toes are pointing. It seems to me that in many cases the face points one way and the toes another. I want my toes and my face to be pointing the same way."

Richard Curnew was in the habit of saying audibly, and often while the meeting was proceeding, "hear, hear," of course this was to show his appreciation of what was said, but it was not always done with discretion, and sometimes it had a ludicrous effect, but Richard always gazed with everybody, and nobody could ever find fault with him.

When Samuel Martin got upon his feet, he, in the most abject terms, professed the greatest humility and self-depreciation. Said he: "I am a great sinner, the greatest in this room." "Hear, hear," said Richard. "I have commit-

broken-hearted, and begged to be taken into the society again. He was a tall muscular man, and when he rose to speak all eyes were turned to him. His strong frame shook with strong feeling, while he said, "He restoreth my soul," and sat down. This short experience sent a thrill of joy through the whole assembly and there were shouts of Hallelujah.

Henry Hooper, who was about to take his departure for another colony, was the next to speak:

"I am about to sail for a foreign land," said he, "I wish to say farewell to you all."

"But we shall meet again,

If not on earth in Heaven,

We shall all meet again."

Then the whole company rose and sang the words to a lively tune. Many a