

## HOSPITALITY AT CHURCH.

The Apostolic command to "use hospitality one to another without grudging" (1 Peter iv, 9), is at least as applicable to the sanctuary as to the home." Every congregation is bound to be hospitable, and upon the principle that the Master has set forth. It is to seek men, not for what it can get from them, but for what it can give to them; not because they are rich, or famous, or have high social standing, but because they are *men*, for whom it holds in trust the Gospel of salvation. Whenever any come to its door they are to be received with the same courtesy that every gentleman and lady feels to be a solemn obligation in their own parlor. They are to be made at once to feel welcome and at home; that they are in the house, not of a certain minister, or of a certain select group of kindred spirits, to which their clothing, or their occupation, or their descent does not admit them on a plane of comfortable equality, but of the common, universal Father.

That this is far from being the case in a vast number of our churches, almost goes without saying. Many a pastor is blamed for not "drawing a congregation," and his reputation for life ruined, when the whole fault lies in the chilling looks and more chilling actions of the congregation; or in the lack of tact or politeness or kindness on the part of the ushers; or in the impertinence of the sexton who loses no occasion of asserting his authority. I know a church where one of the ushers, instead of saying to strangers politely and with a smile of welcome, "If you will wait a moment I will try to find you seats," habitually says, stiffly and coldly, "We are very full here; I don't think I can get you any place to-day." To most strangers, even if they are subsequently accommodated with the best seats, that reception makes all the difference between enjoyment of the service and profit in it, and a rankling irritation which issues in the resolve never to enter that church again. And no warmth or eloquence in the pulpit can right the wrong that was done at the door.

During the past Summer a prominent business man from one of our chief cities was sent as a committee to hear a minister with a view to calling him to a leading pulpit. He understood that he was to preach on a certain day at one of the most

elegant churches on Fifth Avenue. Going to the church at the hour of service he asked a person standing there, whether sexton or usher he could not tell, "Is the Rev. Mr. S. to preach here to-day?" "I am here to seat people, not to answer questions," was the reply, as uncivil in tone as in language. "Well, sir," said my friend, "I am from the — Church in C., if you will come to our door and ask a respectful question, you will be well treated, not insulted." This *fact* is by no means an isolated one.

I met last Summer at Northfield a very delightful gentleman from Philadelphia, whose name, should I write it, would be widely recognized. He is an educated, cultivated man, who stands high enough in his city to be one of the Citizens' Committee of One Hundred on Municipal Reform. I asked him where he worshipped, knowing that by descent he is a Scotch-Irish Presbyterian. "Well," said he, "when I went to Philadelphia I joined the — Presbyterian Church; I owned a seat and attended there regularly for three years, during which not a person in the church spoke to or recognized me; by that time I was frozen out; so I tried a Methodist Church near at hand, and finding a warm welcome, cast in my lot there." This *fact* is by no means an isolated one.

I know all the threadbare replies—"A church is a place for worship, not for sociability." But are these two things contradictory and mutually exclusive? Far from it. The church is a place for *social* worship; and strangers who look at each other suspiciously and measure all new comers by the purse or the calling list, cannot worship socially. There is, indeed, a reverent decorum that becomes the house of God. It forbids all idle, secular talk, all gossip, all making of social engagements or business arrangements. But it *requires* brotherly love, and has no fear of a hand-grasp and a cordial salutation. A high authority says "A shake of the hand is a means of grace."

The last report of the International Committee of the Young Men's Christian Association, makes the startling assertion that seventy-five per cent. of the young men of this country are never seen inside of any church; that only fifteen per cent. of them can be called regular church-goers, and that but five per cent. are communicants.