

FOUNDATION OF A LAY CHURCH.

A SUGGESTION.

BY THE EDITOR.

WHAT is the reason that so many people, and sometimes the very best ones, those who think, stay at home on Sunday and do not attend church? Is it because our clergymen preach antiquated dogmas and the people are tired of listening to them; or is it because the churches themselves are antiquated and their methods have become obsolete? To many these reasons may seem a sufficient explanation; but I believe there are other reasons, and even if in many places and for various reasons religious life is flagging, we ought to revive, and modernise, and sustain church life; we ought to favor the ideals of religious organisations; we ought to create opportunities for the busy world to ponder from time to time on the ultimate questions of life, the problems of death, of eternity, of the interrelation of all mankind, of the brotherhood of man, of international justice, of universal righteousness, and other matters of conscience, etc.

The churches have, at least to a great extent, ceased to be the guides of the people, and among many other reasons there is one quite obvious which has nothing to do with religion or dogma. In former times the clergyman was sometimes the only educated and scholarly person in his congregation, and he was naturally the leader of his flock. But education has spread. Thinking is no longer a clerical prerogative, and there are more men than our ministers worthy of hearing in matters of a religious import. In other words, formerly the pulpit was naturally the ruler in matters ecclesiastic, but now the pews begin to have rights too.

Wherever the churches prosper, let them continue their work; but for the sake of the people over whom the churches have lost

their influence the following proposition would be in order, which will best and most concisely be expressed in the shape of a ready-made

PROGRAM FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A LAY CHURCH.

GENERAL PRINCIPLE.

It is proposed to form a congregation whose bond of union, instead of a fixed creed, shall be the common purpose of ascertaining religious truth, which shall be accomplished, not under the guidance of one and the same man in the pulpit, but by the communal effort of its members in the pews.

NAME AND FURTHER PARTICULARS.

This congregation shall be known by the name of The Lay Church, or whatever name may be deemed suitable in our different communities, and a characteristic feature of it shall be that it will have no minister, but the preaching will be done by its own members or invited speakers.

Far from antagonising the religious life of any Church, The Lay Church proposes to bring to life religious forces that now lie dormant. Religious aspirations have as many aspects as there are pursuits in life, and it is the object of The Lay Church to have representatives of the several professions, of business, the sciences, the arts, and the trades, express their religious convictions upon the moral, political, and social questions of the day.

The Lay Church will establish a free platform for diverse religious views, not excluding the faiths of the established Churches: provided the statements are made with sincerity and reverence.

Since The Lay Church as such will, on the one hand, not be held responsible for the opinions expressed by its speakers, and, on the other hand, not be indifferent to errors and aberrations, monthly meetings shall be held for a discussion of the current Sunday addresses.

The man of definite conviction will find in The Lay Church a platform for propaganda, provided it be carried on with propriety and with the necessary regard for the belief of others: while the searcher for truth will have the problems on which he has not yet been able to form an opinion of his own ventilated from different standpoints.

It is in the nature of this Church that its patrons may at the same time belong to other Churches or to no Church. Nor does

membership imply the severing of old ties or the surrendering of former beliefs.

The spirit of the organisation shall be the same as that which pervaded the Religious Parliament of 1893. Every one to whom the privilege of the platform is granted is expected to present the best he can offer, expounding his own views without disparaging others. And the common ground will be the usual methods of argument such as are vindicated by universal experience, normally applied to all enterprises in practical life, and approved of by the universal standards of truth—commonly called science.