The Melbourne of 1850 to 1875 was as class-conscious as the England from which most of its populace came. The Church of England in Melbourne, or rather, its regularly attending membership, was largely drawn from the upper and middle classes. The underlying assumption — at least of the clergy of the period — appears to have been that those upper and middle class groups would tend to be Christian and hence want to attend Church, while members of the lower classes must needs be brought to faith. As for those attending church we may well ask whether they attended out of Christian conviction or because it seemed the proper thing and provided a useful meeting point for a defined group. In what follows I have not attempted to answer this question but rather to look at the general question of church and people, to see how conscious the Church was of social distinctions, the attempts to overcome these and to look at the Church's reactions to the problems of a growing colony.

The self-consciousness of the Church on the point of its failure to attract the working classes is reflected in the appeals to the "better class" members of the Church to mix with the "lower classes" and help bring them into the Church. Charles Perry, cold evangelical first Bishop of Melbourne was well aware of the situation: in his view it was up to those with money to give more to the Church, or it would become "as the Episcopal Church of the United States has actually become, the Church of the rich only". The problem continued to worry him, and in 1865 addressing the Church Assembly he pointed out that "In parishes where there were a number of affluent people there was a risk that there would be no room for the poorer people . . . In such cases there ought to be additional church accommodation and additional ministerial strength provided by the wealthy parishioners for their poorer brethren." He then proceeded to enlarge on this subject and deprecated the restriction of the ministrations of the church to the upper classes.

From the amount of interest displayed in the special working men's services held in London it would appear that the non-attendance of the working classes at church was generally a problem during the period. The Sydney free mission churches of the 60's were regarded as an interesting experiment and suggestions were made that this example might be followed but not until 1873 was anything really material done regarding it. Clergy visiting was one attempt to overcome this but rather impractical with so few clergy, for example it was estimated that in 1875 there were 15 clergy to 36,000 Anglicans in the inner areas of Melbourne.

Class distinctions were thus recognised and also there are indications that these were not thought to be good within the ranks of the church. Tea meetings were one way these could perhaps be broken down. "... The object clearly is to induce the members of the church to mix together as one body." The real barrier, according to the writer of this article, was felt to be not between the upper and lower classes but "... between each class and the one next below it; and how to overleap it is one of the problems of society most difficult to solve." The value of the tea meeting then "... While the meal is going on people are insensibly drawn into comparatively easy inter-
Of course the social character had to be preserved without infringing on the religious character of the meeting.

The inner city churches belonging to the Church of England covered areas of great wealth and great poverty. It is instructive to compare the number of free sittings with the total amount of available seating. These figures, published in 1857, were not available again during the period, but from the impressions I gained by looking at pew rent books in two parishes (St. Stephen's, Richmond and St. Peter's, Eastern Hill), there would appear to be little change in the figures and if anything a decline in free seating.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parish</th>
<th>Number of Free Sittings</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Melbourne St. James'</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Peter's</td>
<td>about 200</td>
<td>nearly 1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Paul's</td>
<td>about 300</td>
<td>nearly 1,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. John's</td>
<td>No return</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Mark's (Fitzroy and Collingwood)</td>
<td>about 300</td>
<td>about 800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Stephen's (Richmond)</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christ Church (South Yarra)</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>3355</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 1858 an act of the Church Assembly, the legislative body of clergy and laity passed an act to provide for one-sixth of all seats to be free. The only means of finance the church had in many cases, apart from state aid, was the money gained from pew rents, and as the church was in financial difficulties for the whole of the 19th Century we may understand why it was loath to give up pew rents. The initial cost was very great too. The building of expensive churches left encumbered by high debt when opened has led to fixing a high rate of pew rent which has been paid cheerfully by many who could afford it but has proved a serious bar to others in their attendance. This could perhaps mean that it was regarded as degrading to attend church without paying pew rent.

Charles Baker, a prominent layman of the Fitzroy-Collingwood area, constantly spoke about the pew system, advocating free seating and weekly offerings. The foundation of the Anti-Pew Society in England occasioned him to write to the Melbourne church paper denouncing the rents and unhesitatingly laying the blame on them for the working class staying away from church. The leading article of the newspaper, in the manner of a reply to his letter is perhaps a classic in conservative thought on the subject. The writer remembers the squire's pew in the village church, "... the old pensioners in their benches in the aisle rising as the squire and his family passed... regarding them in their inner hearts as beings of a higher order of creation." Though the writer states that his "pleasant memories are no valid argument," it would seem he feels they are, but is content, however, to rest his case on the fact that having paid for a thing like a pew there will be a desire to use it and also there are no ready suitable alternative means of finance. In a later apology it was felt to be un-English to have to find a new seat each time you went to church. The same article, however, questions whether or not too much exclusiveness is shown in church arrangements, and suggests galleries where the poor might be accommodated. Evening celebrations of the Holy Communion were also suggested to assist the attendance of the working classes as they might be too tired to attend church in the mornings.

There can be little doubt then that few of the working classes were likely to be directly influenced by the church through their attendance at it. What is surprising is that comparatively little effort was made to improve the spiritual
condition of these groups. Spasmodic efforts were made such as a special mission to railway workers, but in the way of permanent institutions the first real attempt I found was a proposal made in 1871 to build a small free church in the lower parts of East Collingwood, "an area which has long been notorious for everything bad — drunkenness and vice, filth and wretchedness." The question that I am led to ask is, was there ever any likelihood of the working classes coming to church in any appreciable numbers at all? I did find, at what was the most fashionable Anglican church of Melbourne during this period (St. Peter's) records of tradesmen and labourers being married and having their children baptised. I doubt if these people were ever likely to attend church apart from such occasions. The groups which attended church were those whose occupations were similar to the people who signed "gentleman" in the same registers. The lower class groups felt that the church was not for them and that church-going was a pastime of the upper classes.

The church did not permit the upper classes to go uncriticised, they had certain duties towards society which they were obliged to discharge. Even in 1851 the squatters of the inland came in for some criticism, though they had, "greatly contributed to make this colony not only in wealth but in intelligence and moral principles we cannot, however, altogether vindicate them from the charge which is often alleged against them that they do not take the part which they ought to take in the public religious and charitable institutions of Melbourne." A similar criticism is made again later when commenting on the want of public spirit in Victoria... "Consider the wealthy colonist... owes little to his penetration or perseverance but to all that providence miscalled luck... Look at them — palaces for our material commodities and not unfrequently a sort of genteel born for the House of the Lord." The cause was sought in some prevailing thought or sentiment, the finger being pointed at the lack of national spirit amongst this class. "Our wealthy men do not look on the colony as their home. Not of them can it be said that the lotus of their success has rendered them unmindful of their return... Absenteeism threatens to become a bane to this colony as it has been to Ireland." Criticisms of certain actions of parliamentarians over the land scandals and ministerial crisis were also voiced in the church paper. These became more prominent during the State aid and educational conflicts.

A fair amount of attention is paid to social evils. It seems to be a characteristic of Evangelicalism, the dominant stream in Anglican theology at this stage, that it concentrated pretty heavily on moral issues. The answer to immorality it was thought lay in religion; the fact that there were too few clergy helped account for the growth of moral and social problems. Articles such as "the Power of Religion to Remedy Our Moral and Social Evils" were very typical. The period of the gold rushes threw up moral problems in an acute form. In an article on "Our Social Evils" it was pointed out that "the employment of so many people in searching for gold would tend to demoralise those who were engaged in it, exercise a pernicious influence upon others and derange the whole system of society." The various lamentable effects of the rushes included sabbath breaking, open profanity and a decline in the fear of God. What was probably felt to be the worst effect of the rush was the "insecurity to person and to property," the growth of highway robbers being typical of this. The cause of it all was, of course, the demoralised condition of the lower classes — "We mean the uneducated, unreflecting and sensual portion of the community," their presence was "almost necessarily occasioned" by the money to be made from gold. Such people were "unrestrained by any better
principle than the fear of punishment.” The cures were not to be found in enactments of the legislature but a faithful and earnest ministry of the gospel, education of the rising generation and

“... upon the moral influence which the higher class, the intellectual and thoughtful, and well principled portion of our present colonists and those fresh emigrants who are pouring in upon us from England, may it is hoped gradually acquire upon the mass of the people.”

Of course at the same time it was thought that some good would result from the rushes; to Perry the discovery at first seemed to indicate a gracious providence.” All effort was made to keep spiritual facilities in some proportion to the ever increasing population. Lack of finance, the loss of nine clergy out of twenty-four (by end of 1852) and the extreme difficulty in persuading English clergy to migrate to the Australian bush, all these factors worked against the Church of England at this time. Little wonder that Mrs. Perry was to write in her home correspondence “... that brings me to the subject of gold — that hateful, fearful, baneful subject.”

To a newly arrived clergyman the spectacle was one of horror in this place where “vice parades the streets.” He asks the usual question, “What is being done?” and finds the usual solution in a better supply of ministers and clergy. Little direct social action was taken, a society was set up in 1854 by all the churches to counteract the most obvious of social evils. I was able to find little information on the “Society for the Suppression of Vice,” which is mentioned in the Victorian Directories from 1858 to 1860, there is a report in the church paper of the formation in 1854 of “The Society for the Prevention of Sabbath Desecration and the suppression of Vice.” According to a remark made by a writer in 1936 the same society was revived about ten years later as the Society for the Promotion of Morality, the Church of England took the initiative in both.

The Church could do little but accept the situation and speculated as to the future nation that would arise from the inflow of population. Grants of State aid were welcomed with some misgivings by the church but used to pay stipends and erect churches. The use of laymen instead of clergy to conduct services in isolated areas became more common and it could at least be claimed there was some attempt being made to meet current needs. The attitude of the upper classes towards those enriched by the gold rushes is best represented in statements made by the Bishop.

“In almost all cases a great accession of wealth is a snare, especially to the labouring classes. Their previous habits of life have been such as to render them, for the most part, incapable of applying a large sum of money to any beneficial use. A man must have learned to appreciate the various comforts which money can procure before he can deceive any real advantage from its requisition. Actual wants of one not accustomed to the refinements of the educated classes are few, and satisfied at a very small cost... We do not desire to exclude from the upper classes of society, those who, by their integrity, good judgement and diligence have raised themselves from a humble and dependent to an influential and independent station — on the contrary, we most heartily acknowledge their claim for admittance into it. Let us never forget, however, that the gold is the Lord’s...”

The underlying presumptions are obvious, one was born into the upper ranks of society and could not get there by luck; the commercial classes were generally those who raised themselves and it is interesting to note that a disproportionate number of these were members of the non-Anglican Protestant Denominations.

Alcohol is a convenient bogey to blame for many moral evils. Total abstinence is quite common among Evangelicals and societies for this end
were formed in Melbourne during the 50's. Dr. John Singleton and Judge Pohlman, both Anglican laymen with highly developed social consciences were in favour of total abstinence while it seemed that the Bishop and the majority of churchmen adopted the temperance approach. This is acknowledged, and I feel there must have been some feeling of a characteristic Anglican approach to this problem, "... the extreme principles of the only temperance societies at present in existence have been opposed to the moderation and sober commonsense which have always characterised our church." The writer of this article was prepared to attack uncivilised drinking but the values and standards with which he begins are clearly not those of the working class. He would see a pledge to abolish drinking in hotel bars and attempts to reform Australian drinking habits. The suggestion was taken up by another writer who suggested that such a society would need definite objects and was felt disposed to recommend the formation of "a Liquor Law Reform Association in connection if thought desirable with the Society for the Promotion of Morality." The Bishop felt obliged to add his contribution and wrote denying the pre-eminence of drunkenness as the vice of Victoria and not blaming it for the other vices of gambling, fornication, extravagance, and disobedience to parents which he felt would remain long after drunkenness disappeared. Disobedience to parents, according to Perry, was the root of vice in Victoria and thus it is not surprising to find him addressing the Society for the Promotion of Morality on "Parents and Children." An attempt to introduce a petition to the Legislature to amend the law relating to liquor traffic at a sitting of the Church Assembly received an unfavourable hearing. It was claimed that this was political meddling and that the work of the Assembly extended no further than the affairs of its own church. The indication of such an attitude is, I feel, unhealthy for the general cause of social reform by the church, although such an attitude may well have been justified in this case.

The attitudes and opinions expressed in the church newspapers and from which I have quoted are almost entirely representative of the outlook of one section of society — the "respectable" part. The views are essentially conservative and reactionary, those current in England some two to four decades earlier: they are not those of the small merchant but rather a group used to positions of authority and prestige. While the statements are largely those of the clergy, the type of thought as exemplified by the desire for stability during the rush period is typical of the upper class laity who comprised the church during this period. The terms in which they saw society were largely static and hierarchical and any remarks in respect to the attendance of the working classes at church may be as much a desire for social cohesion as a genuine concern for souls.

NOTES—
1. The Melbourne Church Record, December, 1857.
2. The Melbourne Church Gazette, November 1855.
3. Ibid.
4. For example editorial of the Church of England Messenger, Dec. 3rd, 1859. "If we regard only the Church of England there can be no doubt that the church going in Melbourne is confined chiefly to the ranks of well to do persons." Neither was it thought that "the working class muster in much greater numbers around the banners of other denominations."
5. Church Record, August 1858. Other means included visiting Societies.
6. Record, February, 1861.
7. From the Church Assembly Returns for 1856, bound with the Record for 1857.
9. Record, November, 1867.
10. Record, November, 1861.
11. The Melbourne Church Gazette, October, 1862.
13. See for example the report of service at a non-denominational chapel in Little Bourke Street in 1877, most of the congregation were "respectable people" who came from outside the area. The Vagabond Papers. Third Series Melbourne 1877 — pp. 68-72.
14. Messenger, September, 1851.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid. The following extracts from a special form of prayer drawn up by Bishop Perry show contemporary fears. (Messenger, January, 1852). "... We tremble lest the power of Government should be paralysed and the whole social system be subverted. We tremble lest those should be forgotten. Pour thy grace upon this people in general that they may use thy gifts as not abusing them, may cheerfully obey the laws, may live in peace with one another, may cultivate the special attentions and domestic virtues."
22. A special fund of £30,000 was set up in 1852 to bring out at least 10 clergy — Messenger, May, 1852.
23. Ibid.
29. The consumption of alcohol in Victoria was worrying to all groups at this time and the Roman Catholic Church too had its organizations in this field.
30. Founder and first President of the Melbourne Total Abstinence Society.
31. Messenger, July 14, 1870.
32. Ibid.
33. Messenger, August 12, 1870.