

EMPTY SEATS.

"Are you going to church this morning, Susie?" asked Dr. Clark, lying back in his easy chair, with the morning paper. "A doctor who is out day and night can't be expected." "No. I made jelly yesterday, and I'm tired. I'm faithful enough to stay at home this cloudy morning," and Mrs. Clark curled up on the couch with the Bible she had not opened for a week, but it soon dropped from her hands. She was aroused by a strange voice saying:

"Now, my good imps, what have you done to day to weaken the kingdom of God?"

The voice came from a suspicious-looking personage seated on a throne of human skulls. Around him was gathered a crowd of terrible beings, each with a crown of fire, in which gleamed some name, such as malice, envy, pride, hatred, and kindred passions. "We have been busy to-day, making empty seats in churches," began one. "Nothing could please me better," answered their king. "I persuaded one man that he had a headache, and kept him from a sermon that might have changed his whole life," said one. "I induced one good man to slip to his store and fix up his books," said another, with a horrid grin. "Good!" said the king. "He'll soon give up the Sabbath altogether." "I was able to get one devoted young man to visit some old friends," said one imp. "I worried a good sister about her old bonnet until she decided to stay at home until she got a new one," spoke up the imp labelled "Pride." "And I made several poor women who were hungry for God's word stay at home to repine over their trials. I just said to them, 'O, these rich people don't care for you; you can't wear fine clothes, so I wouldn't go where I was looked down upon.' That way I kept many poor people home whom the rich would have been very glad to see."

"That is one of the best ways to cheat poor people out of heaven that I know of," answered the king with approval. "I induced a

good many men and women to think they were not strong enough to go out," said one called "Indifference." "Of course, all these men will be at their business tomorrow, even if they feel worse. But they could not go to church, where they would have no special mental or physical strain. And the ladies would have been able to clean house or go calling; but I made them think they couldn't walk to church unless they were perfectly well." "Very good," said the king, with a sulphurous grin. "Sunday headaches might often be cured by getting out into the air, and backaches forgotten by thoughts drawn to higher things. But you lying imps must use every weakness of the flesh to help make empty seats." They all smiled, for in their kingdom "lying" was a great compliment. "To make ladies think that their servants need no Sunday privileges is good," suggested one. "Very true," said his superior. As long as we can get Christian people to work during work hours, we can cause or allow men and women to keep many empty seats in churches, and men and women away from God." "I'm the weather imp," said one gloomy fellow. "I go around persuading people it is going to rain, or it is too cold or damp or too hot to venture out to church. It is enough to make even your gloomy majesty laugh to see these same people start out the next day in wind and weather. One would think it a sin to carry umbrellas and wear gum coats to church."

"Confidentially," answered the king, "when I find a Christian who has no more concern about weather Sunday than Monday—determined to make as much effort for spiritual gain as he would for worldly profit—I just give him up. It's no use to try to drag back the man or woman who goes to God's house in all kinds of weather." "I'm able to do a good deal with some of the ladies of the congregation," spoke up the imp labelled "Fashion of this World." "I can make some people stay at home because the new hat did not come, or because their clothes are out of style, or

they have not gotten a new cloak." "I have a better scheme than that," said another. "These people you keep away are indifferent—generally good-for-nothing folks, who are hardly worth getting into the kingdom of his Satanic majesty, but I have a plan that empties seats of the workers in the church."

"That is just what we want," said the king.

"I make these people overwork on Saturday. For instance, I make some good man the preacher depends upon, or some devout Sunday-school teacher to make Saturday the busiest day of the week. I just keep him rushed with neglected things till late at night, and then he oversleeps or is sick the next day, and can't get out." "Splendid plan!" cried Satan. "Yes, it works well with delicate women. If they clean house, or have Saturday company, they can be kept at home without knowing they have broken the Sabbath the day before. A church party late Saturday night helps with empty seats." "You are doing finely, my imps," his majesty said warmly—for his breath was a flame of fire. "Preachers may work and pray over their sermons all week, but there will be no results in preaching to empty seats. One of the most important things we have to consider is how to keep people away from churches on Sunday. Your plans are excellent, but I might suggest another good point. All preachers have human imperfections—some fault of manner or speech. Get Christians to criticize their pastor, especially before their children. If you can stir up a spirit of fault-finding against the preacher or among the members it will help empty seats. People who get mad at each other do not care to go to church together. If the seats are empty, the minister may be a saint and preach like an angel to no purpose. See the result of your labour on High street Church to-day. Not only did the 200 people who stayed at home lose a blessing, but each empty seat did its work against the Lord's kingdom. The preacher made unusual preparation, and went with