

THE PEOPLE AND THE CHURCH

COMMUNICATED.

Fernie, Dec. 27, 1910.
Editor Free Press:

Sir: A few days ago you asked me what, in my opinion, was the reason so many people do not attend church. At the time I was unable to offer any other than to speak for myself. In conversation with a number of men and women since, I have been led to the belief that there are many reasons for non-attendance at churches and with your kind permission I should be obliged if you could give space in your paper for the presentation of a few of them.

One man said, "I do not go to church because I cannot become a member and I feel out of place. I do not feel that I am on the same footing as those who are members. I do not believe some things that church members must profess to believe and I feel that I would be sailing under false colors if I were a regular attendant at the services in any church."

The above, in many forms, was the substance of reasons given by many for their absence from church. They feel that they cannot be of the church and therefore will not lean on it.

Another man told me that he did not go to church regularly because the church which he favored seemed to recognize social distinctions in a way that took it out of harmony with the feelings of a sensitive man.

"I do not go to church," said one emphatically, "not because I am not in sympathy with the work that the church purports to do, but because I cannot attend a service without feeling that I have been a witness of or participated in a lot of sham and hypocrisy. My conception of the Ruling Power of the universe is altogether at variance with the conception that I see manifested in the churches. I cannot conceive of a Perfect Being who wants His creatures to praise Him, who wants His creatures to erect costly altars to His glory on earth, or who can be moved by prayers or propitiated by praise."

"When the parsons and church members can show me that they are living any better than many of us who do not go to church I shall be glad to become a church member. When I satisfy myself that I would be a better man for attending church services I'll be there."

"Because I don't believe in the stuff that is preached there. It may be all right but I can't subscribe to it. I don't believe that God murdered His Son for my sake. If I thought He did I should want to renounce Him. I can't get this Trinity idea through my head. I can't see that a man can be sanctified except by his deeds. Too much importance is attached to forms and confessions of faith. It may be all right but I honestly can't accept it."

"Which church shall I go to?"
"I went to church when I was young. I heard a lot of things that I only hear over and over again when I go now. Some way it don't seem to impress me. I guess I am too tough a proposition for the church spirit to penetrate."

"Because I won't associate myself with a bunch of hypocrites. I don't say they are all hypocrites, but I know that I should be one if I pretended to travel with that bunch."

"Why should I go to church?"
"What's the use. I come away as bad as I went and with more discontent. Not with myself, but with the church that fails to do anything for me."

"Why don't YOU go to church?"
Some feminine reasons:
"I have no clothes." This from several.

"My husband does not care to go and I do not like to go alone."
"Mr. — did not call on us."

"I drifted away from the church. I was once a member of the church. Looking back on that time I think I went into it lightly. The obligation of church membership seems much more serious now. It imposes duties to which I do not feel equal. I don't think that I was any better for being in the church. As I remember it, my religious feelings were not at all inspired. I think possibly it was because I thought it was fashionable, using the word in the sense of it being the common practice, that I was identified with the church. My children

went to Sunday school but they do not go to church. I don't know why."

"I don't think people who go to church are any better than those who don't."

A nurse said: "The church does not appeal to me. I think people go to church for what they can get out of it. I don't mean in a material sense altogether, although material advantages do attract many to the churches, but the church seems to hold out to some people an opportunity to escape the consequences of their own actions. I don't think Christ can save me. I will have to save myself. I do go to church occasionally. In my experience the average professing Christian is more concerned over his future life, when the time comes to prepare for eternity, than the average patient who makes no religious professions."

These are all actual expressions almost word for word, with people with whom I have talked.

I believe that people are not drifting away from the church. I think they are travelling away from it. The church seems to be founded on a rock in more senses than one. It is immovable; humanity is not. Humanity progresses. The church clings to the past and reveres as sacred the institutions and doctrines with which it has long been identified. It gives way slowly to modern thought. It follows where it should lead.

Now, Sir, I am free to confess that I have said nothing new. But after the investigations I have made, fragmentary though they are, I am convinced of what I before offered you only as a possible theory, that orthodoxy is cramping the influence of the churches.

Those who are most deeply concerned with the church wonder why so many people do not attend. They are invited to attend church. That is, they are invited into the church building. They are not welcome into the church as an institution except on conditions that cannot be accepted. Too many people can attend church only as spectators and auditors, not as participants in a divine service. They weary easily of the part they take, all the more easily if they too have thought deeply on religious subjects and have arrived at conclusions that place them out of sympathy with the ritual or policy of the church. Instead of bread they are offered fossils — or confectionery.

Yours truly,
F. S.

ST. CATHERINE PARTY.

A Jolly Evening With the Patron Saint of Old Maids.

Every dog has his day, and the old maid, not the up to date bachelor girl who scorns such a useless piece of furniture in her cozy little apartment as a husband, but the genuinely sentimental old maid, can have a day on the 25th of November if she so desires, for this is St. Catherine's day, the patron saint of "old maids." In France even the twentieth century maiden takes her love affairs seriously, and she goes to church bright and early on the 25th of November armed with a bouquet, which she lays upon the altar, offering at the same time a prayer to St. Catherine to send her a husband and "soon, please, dear St. Catherine." The American girl cuts out the religious ceremony on this auspicious occasion, and though her heart be aching, she makes merry with a party, and if she prays it is not like the Pharisee on the street corner, but in secret beside her couch bed.

A jolly old maid—a namesake, by the way, of the martyred St. Catherine of Alexandria—is sending out invitations for a "rally," as she flippantly calls her St. Catherine's party. These invitations are in the guise of postcards with little Sally Water of nursery fame weeping and wailing for a young man as the decorative feature, and they read:

A ST. CATHERINE'S RALLY.
Come and help me elect a husband. Last meeting before the campaign closes. November twenty-fifth, nine p. m.

The guests will not be bidden apparently to the house of mirth, for in the reception room all is uncertainty and gloom. Funeral looking gray moss, caught up with pierced silver beads, drapes the room, and the only light is that from numberless candles held in sconces and candlesticks hung with black. Suspended from the central chandelier is a ballot box, the bottom of which is covered with thin paper. Through a central opening depend streamers of red ribbon. The box is black and lettered in red—matrimonial ballot. After greeting their hostess each guest will be asked to vote, which means to pull an end of the ribbon hanging from the ballot box. On the box end is attached a piece of paper with a number on it. About the room are men's coats of various sizes with corresponding numbers on them. The girls match their numbers to the coats, and the man whose numeral corresponds to that of a girl's must try to fill the garment and become the fiance of the owner for the evening. Lots of fun ensues during this casting and recasting of votes.

A game to be played later on is accomplished by having prepared beforehand as many peanut shells as there are people, each one filled with a paper on which are several letters of a word, and the complement of letters is placed in another shell. The shells are tied together with narrow ribbon. The object of the game is to find the person who has the letters completing the word. The letters of the words are divided evenly between the men and the girls—that is, a man has one part of the word and a girl the other half. After talking with his partner for ten minutes the girls go out of the room and the men are handed cards on which are the following questions:

"What is the color of her eyes?"
"The shade of her hair?" "How is her hair arranged?" "The style of her frock?" "What color is it?"

The man who answers the greatest number of questions satisfactorily is presented with a prize.

When supper is announced St. Catherine is supposed to have taken pity on the old maids, and, having provided each with a prospective husband, all is joy. The supper room is brightly lighted, in marked contrast with the gloom that has previously prevailed. As this company is to be a small one, a large round table seats them all. Above the center of the table is hung a small sized child's jumping hoop, bound with gold colored crepe paper, symbolical of the wedding ring. Holding the hoop in position are converging strings of white satin ribbon that meet in the center and are tied to the bottom of the gas fixture. Graduated ends of this half inch ribbon are hung at intervals downward from the hoop, and on the ends of each ribbon is a cupid, the shorter loops holding a small god of love and the longer ones a larger figure. In the center of the table and under the chandelier decoration is a huge white frosted cake ornamented with an upstanding figure of St. Catherine. The ices are in the form of a saint with a halo about her head, and all the decorations are carried out in the same "good" fashion.

A Supper Salad.
A toothsome salad may be arranged of fruit and lettuce for a little supper after the theater or for any informal evening occasion.

Cups are made out of the heart of lettuce, and in each is put sliced pears, apples, bananas and walnuts covered with mayonnaise or French dressing.

It can be prepared beforehand and put into the refrigerator to chill. It should be served cold on dainty little plates. With it have sandwiches made of thin slices of graham bread covered with French dressing and boiled red Spanish peppers with celery chopped up and put under the peppers.

Cocoanut Drops.
Take one pound of grated cocoanut, half a pound of pulverized sugar and the whites of four eggs beaten to a stiff froth. Have enough white of egg to wet the sugar and cocoanut. Beat together thoroughly, drop on buttered tins in drops the size of a coin and bake.

W. H. Whimster left for Winnipeg on Thursday.

E. H. H. Stanley is home from Los Angeles.

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