

*The Troubles
Of
A Village Church*



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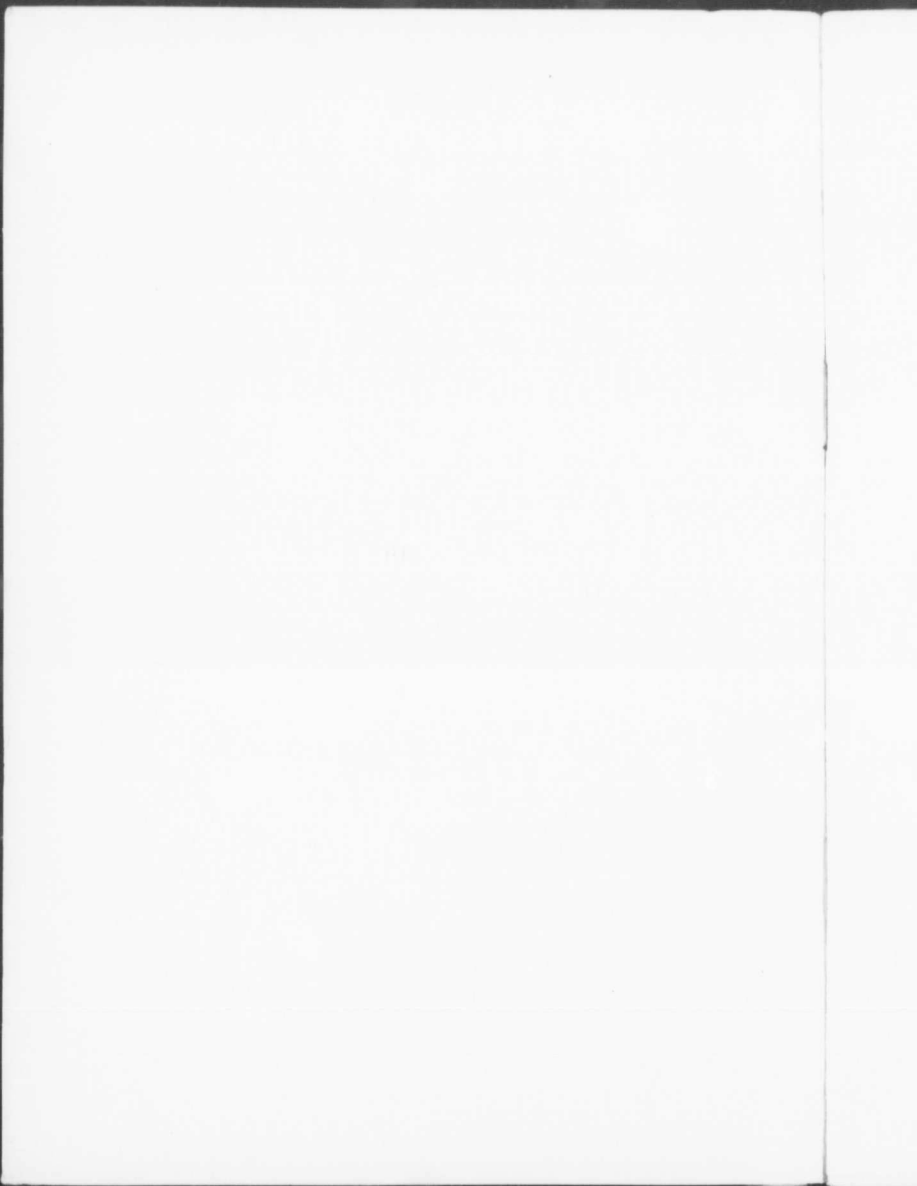
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A. E. Reeve

The Troubles of a Village Church



The
Troubles of a Village Church

*A Series of Short Stories Told in Verse
from the Bedside of an
Invalid*

by

ALBERT E. REEVE

*Author of "The Quiet Hour," "Little Rays of Sunshine,"
Etc., Etc.*



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CONTENTS



PART	PAGE
I The Village Church and Its Officers	7
II The Minister Reads the Sunday Morning An- nouncements	9
III The "Epworth League" Holds a Discussion on "New Theology."	11
IV The "Ladies' Aid" Holds a Matinee	13
V A Meeting of the "Church Board"	16
VI The Village Church Holds Its "Annual Tea".....	18
VII Arranging the Concert Programme	21
VIII Holding an Election for Deacons	24
IX A Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting	27
X The Choir Gives a Concert	30
XI Why the Minister was Asked to Resign.....	32
XII The "New Idea" Minister Makes His Debut.....	35

TIME AND PLACE

A. D. 1915

The Village of Twinkleville, B. C.

CHARACTERS:

A "NEW IDEA" PARSON — Rev. Horatio Spinks

AN "OLD TIME" PARSON—Rev. Ebenezea Ford

DEACONS—Artemus Stone, Phineas Ross, Ambrose Green, Caleb Smart.

DEACONESS—Miss Demure

SEC.—Jonathan Swift

TREAS.—Alphonso Briggs

CHOIR MASTER—Josiah Ball

EPWORTH LEAGUE PRES.—Peter Muggins

LADIES' AID PRES.—Mrs. Samantha Chattam

Sundry other officers, members and Sunday

School Children

The Troubles of a Village Church

PART I.

The Village Church and Its Officers

This story of a village church,
With all its trials and woes,
Is not a piece of fiction,
But truth, as each one knows.
'Tis situated in a spot
That all can easily find;
A rather quaint old building that
No architect designed.

The parson was a good old soul
Named Ebenezer Ford,
Whose words of timely wisdom
The members oft ignored.
There was a secretary, too,
In whom they could confide;
Four deacons and a deaconess,
A treasurer beside.

Deacon Stone had made his wealth
And won himself a name
By sundry deals in real estate;
It was a paying game.

In bygone days a humble man,
Now he'd got over that,
And puffed with pride to church he went
In frock coat and silk hat.

Deacon Green, for many years
Had dealt in merchandise,
The man who got the best of him
Had got to be quite wise.
Deacon Smart owned several mills,
Immensely rich was he,
But ne'er was known to give a cent
Towards aiding charity.

Deacon Ross loaned out his gold,
Because he had so much.
At least that's what he told you
Ere you were in his clutch.
But once within the deacon's power
He saw he got his due,
And you became a wiser man
When he got through with you.

That church had many members,
With wealth some were endowed;
It had a choir of voices
That made the village proud.
An "Epworth League," a "Sunday School,"
An organ sweet and grand,
Its Bible class could not be beat
By any in the land.

The Troubles of a Village Church

PART II.

The Minister Reads the Sunday Morning Announcements

The Sunday morning meeting
 Was almost to a close,
 The parson once again replaced
 His glasses on his nose;
 Then from his congregation,
 Attention now he bade,
 Announcements for the coming week
 Were going to be made.

Said he, please give attention
 To meetings for this week:
 On Monday eve the Epworth League,
 When Brother Green will speak;
 On Tuesday night the trustee board
 Will hold a meeting, too,
 When matters of importance
 Will each receive their due.

On Wednesday night a gathering
 For prayer and praise alone,
 Please try, then, to be present
 And hear good Deacon Stone.
 On Thursday afternoon, at three,
 The Ladies' Aid will meet,
 If you have time, just come along,
 You'll find it quite a treat.

On Thursday night at 7 p. m.,
 Chair taken by Brother Spence,
 We'll give a tea and concert,
 Admission, fifty cents.
 We hope by this to raise the funds
 And free ourselves from debt;
 Come, bring your friends and relatives,
 Should it be fine or wet.

On Friday night, at 8 o'clock,
 The choir will gather here,
 To practice hymns and anthems
 All to our hearts so dear.
 We still have left some vacancies
 For voices good and true,
 If you can sing, please come along,
 We'll gladly welcome you.

These are all the notices
 I have before me now,
 Let's sing again another hymn
 'Then in prayer we'll bow.
 The parson asked a blessing,
 Each stood and bowed his head;
 That village church was then dismissed
 And members homeward sped.



The
Troubles of a Village Church

PART III.

*The Epworth League Holds a Discussion on
"New Theology"*

Monday eve came fine and clear,
The moon was shining bright,
Our Epworth League was holding
A meeting on this night.
The subject for discussion
Was how to cultivate
A taste for new theology,
All else was out of date.

The president called order,
And next in prayer he led;
Then minutes were read over
And business went ahead.
Said Brother Jones, "We've got to put
These old ideas away,
The flood, the ark and Aaron's rod
Are fables of their day."

Said Sister Ann Amelia Smith,
"I've not the slightest doubt
That the Bible needs revising
And three parts of it cut out."
Up jumped Brother Brown in haste
And quickly made reply,
"This new theology is trash
And ne'er will satisfy."

Up rose Brothers Bryant and Gray,
 And several sisters, too,
 Each one tried to state their views,
 But nothing could they do.
 The argument waxed warm and keen,
 'Twas Babel o'er and o'er.
 "Order, please," the chairman cried,
 "Brother Brown has got the floor."

That good old brother held it, too,
 And finished up his speech.
 "This theme of new theology
 Is quite unfit to preach.
 I love the good old gospel best,
 By it I'll stand or fall,
 These new ideas are thoughts of men,
 Not born from God at all."

That speech upon the members fell
 Just like a thunderbolt,
 Not one of them dared speak a word,
 Their creed had got a jolt.
 Some members, from the president,
 New theology had learned;
 He looked around and quietly said,
 "This meeting stands adjourned."



The
Troubles of a Village Church

PART IV.

The Ladies' Aid Hold a Matinee

'Twas a warm and sultry day,
No breeze to cool the air,
Amid the trees sweet birds sang
In notes so soft and clear.
This was Thursday afternoon,
And at the hour of three,
The "Ladies' Aid" intended
To hold a matinee.

Members came in one by one,
Soon all were gathered there,
Meeting opened, roll was called,
With Sister Chattem in the chair.
There were various business matters
For the ladies to discuss,
But these were soon disposed of
Without a bit of fuss.

The chairman said, "This meeting now
Will give each one a chance;
So ladies, please express your thoughts
And new ideas advance.
We want to be progressive,
So my advice then heed,
In fashion, style, and etiquette
All churches we must lead.

Sister Wilkins rose to speak,
 She was a spinster true;
 She'd seen near fifty summers,
 But owned to thirty-two.
 Her hair hung down in ringlets,
 Her voice, just like a thrush,
 The color in her garments
 Would make a rainbow blush.

"Sister Chattem, have you heard
 What Parson Ford has done?
 For hired help engaged a girl
 Who is but twenty-one.
 I think that this is awful,
 And if help he must engage,
 Why, then, not find a woman
 Somewhere about his age?"

Next Sister Prim rose up to speak,
 Then Sister Jellus, too.
 Both had grievances to air,
 And that they meant to do.
 Each one claimed to have the floor
 And neither would keep quiet,
 So the president called "Order,"
 Which almost caused a riot.

Sister Stacey did her best,
 And so did Sister Prout,
 In trying to make a state of peace
 When someone gave a shout:

“A mouse, a mouse; run for your lives.”
The ladies gave a screech
And uttered sundry sentences
Which parsons never teach.

Some climbed upon the tables,
Others on the chairs;
Some crawled into the cupboards,
Some hid beneath the stairs;
Others bolted out the door,
It was a sight to see,
And this is how the “Ladies’ Aid”
Broke up their matinee.

This meeting may a moral teach,
For it is very plain
Scandal has ruined many lives
And will do so again.
Those who help to sow the seeds
Of enmity and strife
Are filled with fear at tiny things
Which chance to cross their life.



The Troubles of a Village Church

PART V.

A Meeting of the Church Board

The rain fell down in torrents
 Throughout the afternoon,
 Dark clouds now o'erspread the sky
 And hid the stars and moon.
 'Twas Tuesday eve, the village church
 Resplendent shone with light,
 The management were holding
 A meeting there that night.

Through circumstances unforeseen
 The parson was not there.
 So someone moved that Deacon Ross
 Should occupy the chair.
 Carried without dissenting voice,
 No further noise or fuss,
 For 'twas matters of importance
 Which they were to discuss.

Correspondence was read o'er,
 Accounts for payment passed;
 Then the chairman said, "Well, brethren,
 Questions, you now may ask."
 Brother Green rose up to speak
 And thus did he begin,
 "I'd like to have our preacher send
 His resignation in.

Advantages I now can see
 Which we will surely gain,
 Our parson is so personal,
 His talk is far too plain.
 He must be taught that as the 'board'
 Our rights we must uphold,
 His gospel views are out of date,
 A thousand years too old."

"Hear, hear," a brother cried aloud,
 "I quite agree with you,
 And every member of this board
 Can take no other view.
 If we don't lead in style and grace
 What, then, will be our fate?
 I move we ask the conference for
 A preacher, up-to-date.

'Twas trouble then, the storm had broke.
 The chairman tried in vain
 To peace restore; he might as well
 Have tried to stop a train.
 The motion carried 'mid applause,
 The pastor was deposed;
 A committee picked to break the news
 And then the meeting closed.

The Troubles of a Village Church

PART VI.

The Village Church Holds Its Annual Tea

Children now for many days
Had waited anxiously
For Thursday, when the minister
Would give them all a tea.
The day arrived, the boys and girls
Put on their Sunday clothes
With collars white, and ribbons gay,
Clean shoes and pretty hose.

Ma and Pa, clad in their best,
And baby sister, too,
Grandpa, in a new white vest,
Grandma, in bonnet blue.
Hand in hand and arm in arm
They slowly wend their way
Down to the little village church,
Their hearts so light and gay.

In the schoolroom of that church
Large tables had been spread,
With snow-white cloths, on which repos
Large piles of buttered bread.
Currant cakes and jelly cakes,
And some with lemon peel,
Tempting piles of sandwiches
Which made you hungry feel.

Soon around those laden tables
 Each one had found a place,
 Then the minister came in
 And spoke a word of grace.
 He bade them all get busy,
 Their appetites appease;
 Those people did it with a will,
 Just like a swarm of bees.

There were a lot of helpers,
 For each a task was found,
 So Sister Sweet was thus assigned
 To hand the sugar 'round.
 She was a pretty maiden
 With graceful winning ways,
 The bane of many ladies
 Who had seen younger days.

As time went on the guests began
 To sip their cups of tea.
 Again they sipped, and faces made
 That were a sight to see.
 Grandpas coughed and spluttered,
 Grandmas tried to sneeze,
 Violent fits of coughing
 Each one seemed to seize.

Ladies used their handkerchiefs,
 Babies peevish grew,
 Tears were in the children's eyes
 As noses hard they blew.

Someone had changed the sugar
And in its place put salt,
No one could explain the trick
Or who had caused the fault.

The troubles of that evening
Had spoilt the social tea,
And so Parson Ford decided
That another there should be.
Sadness thus was changed to joy,
The guests all homeward sped,
And soon all little children
Were safely tucked in bed.



The
Troubles of a Village Church

PART VII.

Arranging the Concert Programme

The day would soon be drawing nigh
To hold the annual tea
And concert, when the village choir
Would sing in song and glee,
For Josiah Ball was very strict,
And made them toe the mark,
His chorus of sopranos
Could sing just like a lark.

He gave them timely notice, that
Friday afternoon at four,
A special meeting would be held
To talk the matter o'er,
And there and then he wished that those
Who could recite or sing,
Or play upon an instrument,
To come and music bring.

He looked o'er songs and readings,
And music sweet and rare,
And then at once decided
A programme to prepare.
But when vanity predominates
Sometimes there is a fall,
And when that village choir met
It fell on Leader Ball.

The programme was read over,
 He wished all to be fair,
 And in selecting talent
 Had exercised much care.
 There he made a great mistake,
 For each lady laid a claim
 To singing powers she possessed
 That soon would win her fame.

Johanna Trill was thunderstruck,
 For her name had been missed,
 When she had cherished up the thought
 That she would head the list.
 She asked the leader to explain,
 And a good reason quote
 Why she'd been passed for other folks
 Who ne'er could sing a note.

Then Bella Scraggs, without delay,
 Josiah took in hand,
 For as an elocutionist
 She claimed to lead the land.
 Why was she missed she'd like to know,
 Was it an oversight,
 For she had meant to outshine all
 Upon that concert night.

Now, Josiah Ball was quite upset
 And tried hard to explain
 The reasons for his actions,
 No use, 'twas all in vain.

Those ladies would not listen,
With envy they could cry.
They dared, and glared, and stared at him
With battle in their eyes.

Josiah tried to speak a word,
But they'd take no excuse;
In fear and trembling there he stood
'Mid torrents of abuse.
He turned and looked appealingly
To where male members sat,
But each one seemed to have his eye
Upon his coat and hat.

First one quietly slipped away,
And then another, too.
Without a pause those ladies talked,
Then at each other flew.
Josiah saw this was his chance,
And did not hesitate
Or look around to watch the pair
Continue their debate.



The
Troubles of a Village Church

PART VIII.

Holding an Election for Deacons

An event of great importance,
Was very close at hand,
For deacons of that little church
Election then would stand.
Excitement was at fever heat
To see who would get in,
Each clique worked hard and faithful
To have its champion win.

Now, Deacon Stone and Deacon Smart
Both claimed they'd had enough,
And for election would not stand,
But that was only bluff.
They meant to stay right in the front,
Cared not who was behind;
Their social standing they must keep
And never be outshined.

Old Deacon Green, the merchant,
Was going to run again,
And so to all his customers
He made it very plain.
For some owed bills for merchandise,
Which now they could not pay,
And notices to settle up
Quite filled them with dismay.

Deacon Ross, who always claimed
 To work without a fee,
 Also was a candidate,
 And elected wished to be.
 He hinted here, and hinted there
 That he must head the poll,
 Or else to those within his power
 No mercy would he dole.

The members held a meeting,
 And all finally agreed
 That every deacon of the church
 His cause should justly plead.
 An invitation each received
 That, at the hour of three
 They'd come and show good reasons why
 Elected they should be.

Exactly at the appointed hour
 They all were present there.
 Deacon Smart, in brand new suit
 Arranged with every care;
 Deacon Stone, in long frock coat,
 Gold pincenez on his nose;
 Deacon Ross and Deacon Green,
 Both in their Sunday clothes.

They claimed that by their actions
 The church had won great fame,
 Those deacons weaved a story
 That would Ananias shame,

And tried to make the members think
For love alone they'd worked,
But nearly all the people thought
That duty they had shirked.

All the actions they performed
Were done for selfish gain,
And if he considered carefully, on
The church would bring a stain;
For pride had so o'ercome them
That good judgment they did lack,
And for every cent expended
They looked for twenty back.

Those deacons had to step aside
And others took their place,
Who willingly would work for God
And not the church abase.
Deacons should good examples be
And never use the church
Just as a cloak to hide their sins
And religion thus besmirch.



The Troubles of a Village Church

PART IX.

A Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting

The bell within the steeple
Was tolling loud and clear,
Summoning all village folks
To come from far and near.
This was Wednesday evening,
A night for praise and prayer,
When everyone could meditate
And rest from worldly care.

All meetings of this nature
Were very much enjoyed
By older members of the church,
Who ne'er would one avoid.
They loved to hear the gospel
As preached by Parson Ford,
It cheered and much inspired them with
Devotion to the Lord.

The minister had gone away
To try and take a rest,
And so on Deacon Stone it fell
To try and do his best.
Between the men, no contrast,
Each had different views,
And what one loved to speak upon
The other ne'er would choose.

Several stirring hymns were sung,
 Joined in by every one.
 Then a discourse showing how
 All sin we need must shun.
 Then Deacon Stone invited
 Some brother now to pray;
 This was the opportunity
 For good old Brother Flay.

He prayed away most earnestly,
 And asked for strength each day
 To live upright so that he might
 Help others on their way.
 A blessing next he truly craved
 For all his fellow men,
 Just then one of the members,
 Shouted out "Amen."

Deacon Stone looked all around
 The culprit to detect,
 For persons who would shout aloud
 Could have no self respect.
 Just then another voice was heard
 Saying "Praise His name."
 It greatly shocked the deacon,
 His heart was filled with shame.

Said he, "My brethren, let us arise,
 Some things I wish to say,
 Those folks who do the shouting
 From church must stay away.

We cannot stand such nonsense,
It is undignified,
We've modern methods now, by which
God may be glorified.

The deacon tried hard to explain
Just what he really thought,
But each word that he uttered
With hollowness was fraught.
He'd never learned the Scripture,
Or surely he would know
God's blessing sometimes is so great
That hearts will overflow.



The Troubles of a Village Church

PART X.

The Choir Gives a Concert

The village choir worked very hard
 And practiced faithfully,
 Music played and voices raised
 In solo, song, and glee.
 A concert they were going to give
 As ne'er was given before,
 And for lovers of sweet music
 A treat was now in store.

On the following Thursday
 Sharp at eight-fifteen,
 Arrayed in all their splendor
 The choir would be seen.
 Gents in swallow-tailed coats,
 White ties and hard boiled shirts,
 Ladies dressed so gracefully
 In silken waists and skirts.

At last the final practice o'er,
 Hearts fluttered to and fro,
 And certain members of that choir
 Nervous began to grow.
 Josiah Ball calmed all their fears
 And said: "Now please be sure
 To watch my baton for your cue,
 Don't look down at the floor.

The church so brightly lighted
 Made quite a festive scene,
 All the seats were occupied,
 Excitement was quite keen.
 First came an opening chorus,
 Then a grand solo;
 Afterwards two ladies sang
 That duet "Be My Beau."

Next that brilliant medley:
 "I'm but a Village Lass,"
 Josiah gave the signal,
 That chorus rose up "en masse,"
 Bassos in sonorous tones,
 Tenors clear and true,
 Altos and sopranos,
 A stringed orchestra, too.

The audience were enraptured,
 And listened with delight,
 When, without a moment's warning,
 Some one turned off the light.
 Now, surely, here was trouble.
 Who had the mean trick planned?
 That choir could not now discern
 Their leader's guiding hand.

That pretty, bright selection
 In vain they tried to rend,
 But, without lights and leader,
 It soon came to an end.
 The chairman made apologies,
 'Twas all that he could do,
 The troubles of that vilage church
 Would ne'er seem to be through.

The Troubles of a Village Church

PART XI.

Why the Minister Was Asked to Resign

By maple trees surrounded,
 Yet hidden not from view,
 There lay a pretty cottage, o'er
 Whose walls sweet roses grew.
 It was the village Parsonage,
 All was home-like there,
 Gravelled walks, a well-kept lawn,
 Flowers bloomed everywhere.

The parson in his study sat,
 Books before him open lay,
 He was studying a sermon
 To preach next Sabbath day.
 When he heard the tread of footsteps
 Upon the gravel walk,
 And then the sound of voices
 Engaged in earnest talk.

He peered out through the window,
 And there before his eyes
 He saw the deacons of the church;
 It was a great surprise.
 He rose, and opening the door,
 Then bade them step within,
 Gave each a chair and then at once
 The trouble started in.

Already it was decided
 Deacon Stone should break the news;
 But now he felt embarrassed,
 Still dared not to refuse.
 He sneezed and coughed and cleared his throat,
 Arranged his vest again,
 Scratched his head vehemently
 And wondered why he came.

The parson broke the silence,
 And said: "Well, gentlemen,
 What brings you here this afternoon,
 Not business, what is it then?
 Old Deacon Stone with downcast eyes,
 And voice so mild and meek,
 Said: "We have got some news for you,
 Pray listen while I speak.

"Last night the board of management
 Held quite a long debate,
 And there and then decided
 That our church was out of date.
 New themes and new theology
 For these church-goers pine;
 You're views, then, you must alter,
 Or else at once resign.

"Your methods and your doctrines
 Were all right in their day,
 But you must change your teaching
 Or the folks will stay away."

That good old parson sat amazed,
And stroked his snow white hair,
Rose up and said: "My brothers,
Let's have a word of prayer."

"Father in Heaven Thou knowest
For forty years have I,
Truthfully preached Thy written word,
Why now, then, should I lie?
Christ for all was crucified,
His blood can satisfy,
I know no other doctrine,
By it I'll stand or die."

Slowly he regained his feet,
And then these words he spake,
"You've listened to my answer,
No other will I make;
My resignation you can have,
The Gospel you may ban,
I'll speak and teach the word of God,
Not preach the whims of man."



The
Troubles of a Village Church

PART XII.

The "New Idea" Minister Makes His Debut

Within the annals of the church
This was the day of days.
Horatio Spinks had now arrived
And would direct its ways.
The Board had clamored Conference
That their minister be changed,
And soon were duly notified
It had been so arranged.

The minister at once announced
In an elaborate speech,
He would next Sunday morning
His opening sermon preach.
That morning he would outline
And all his plans would state,
To make the little village church
A church right up-to-date.

Next Sunday all the members
Appearance punctual made,
Deacons four, and trustee board,
Each spotlessly arrayed.
Within the confines of that church
Silence reigned supreme,
And hearts awaited anxiously
The parson and his scheme.

The pulpit now he occupied,
 And firstly prayers were said,
 Next, sweet hymns and anthems sung,
 The Sunday lesson read.
 Rising thus, the parson spoke :
 "A few remarks I'll make,
 My plans will clearly show you
 What course I mean to take.

"The world is changing every day
 At a very rapid rate,
 And if we do not keep apace
 What would be our fate!
 Class meetings, Sunday mornings,
 I think we should discard,
 Sunday Schools are lots of work
 And also should be barred.

"Monday night the Epworth League
 At meeting will debate
 'What is New Theology?'
 Let all its merits state.
 Tuesday night the Trustee Board
 Will talk church matters o'er,
 Prayer meetings through the week are now
 A thing required no more.

This is now a strenuous age,
 And through the world we race,
 Religion, then, must be condensed
 Into a tiny space.

On Sunday morning folks are tired,
And need to take a rest;
One sermon on each Sabbath, then,
I'm sure will suit you best.

“Bible classes are a farce,
Of that I have no doubt,
For nine-tenths of the Scriptures
Could safely be left out,
The stories of the ark and flood
Have many led astray,
Theology has clearly proved
Them fables of their day.

“All men who hold such doctrines
Church Boards should quickly shun,
Or else they'll find their troubles
Have only just begun.
Ministers take your Bibles,
Look up Revelations 2,
There you'll read a message,
'Tis Christ's command to you.”

