

A LITTLE CLINIC ON THE STATUS OF CHURCH-GOING.

(By Howard A. Bridgman, in July Outlook.)

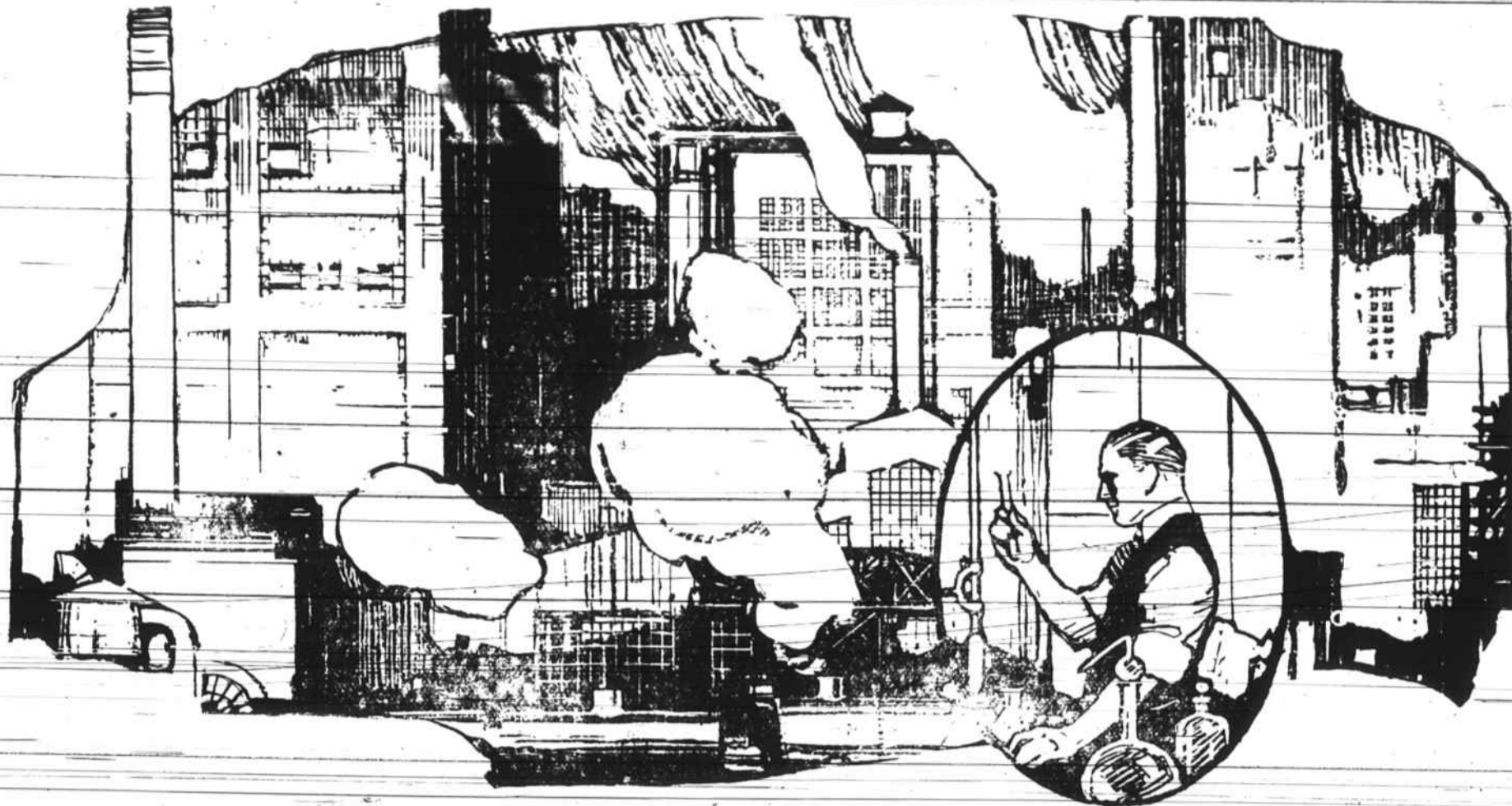
Why do people go to church? But they don't. Haven't you read Dr. Jeremiah Croaker's lamentations in a recent number of the "Transcontinental Magazine" ever the empty pews in city sanctuaries and the unoccupied horse-sheds behind the village meeting-house that are no longer tenanted by vehicles drawn by horses or propelled by gasoline? Don't you realize that all the great preachers are dead and that the theological seminaries are no good and that an army of high-salaried overhead officials are simply trying to galvanize the churches into a semblance of life by instituting artificial drives and campaigns, and that nobody goes anywhere except to dances and the movies?

Yes, we've read that article, and others like it. They are due to appear about once in five years with almost clocklike regularity and for at least ten days to furnish material for editorial comment on the part of the secular and religious press and for animated discussions at the ecclesiastical gatherings. But while the articles are being written and compliments and maledictions are being showered upon the authors something else is happening. And what is that? Oh, just a steady procession of men, women, and children Sunday after Sunday starting from hundreds of thousands of all kinds of homes in all parts of America and ending at the portals of churches of all sizes, shapes, and denominational affiliations.

Let us come at once to particulars. Let me take a cross-section of one of our larger cities and put it under the magnifying-glass for the purpose of observation. From one city we can learn, or at least infer, what is happening in the matter of church-going from coast to coast. Boston is as good a city as any in the country for our ecclesiastical clinic. Perhaps it is better than some, for Boston, Puritan city though it be by tradition, is not conspicuously orthodox today or nearly so devoted to church-going as, say, Toronto or Los Angeles. Boston has always been a seed-bed for religious fads. The faithful—whatever their peculiar faith—tend toward flocking by themselves in the glory of their perfect independence. This drift multiplies the small groups and makes against unity and large unified demonstrations of the church-going habit.

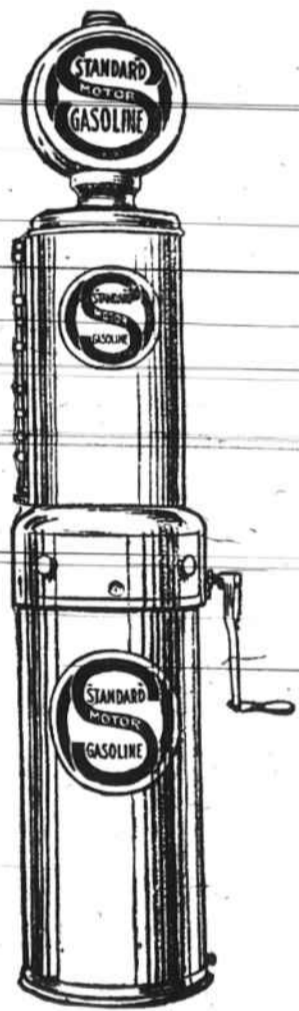
Nevertheless it is in Boston that we find today certain phenomena that rather disturb us when we jauntily declare that nobody goes to church; at least they should lead us to postpone the final obsequies, in honor of a good old custom received from the fathers, until we have candidly sought, not to pass a snap judgment based on a few scattered and misleading data, but to get an all-round view of the situation. I have this current season attended service in five different Boston churches any one of which is a sufficient proof of the fact that people do go to church, notwithstanding the assertions of magazine writers and arm-chair critics. What is more to the point, people have been going to these churches in great numbers year after year, decade after decade, and will doubtless continue to go long after the weeping Jeremiahs have made their last contributions to the "Transcontinental Magazine" and the "Monday Afternoon Gazette." These five churches are Tremont Temple (Baptist), Park Street Church (Congregational), Old South Church (Congregational), and the Christian Science church. They represent four different communions, but their denominational differences are less noticeable even than the variations in type.

Tremont Temple is a good representative of the modern religious organization which caters to the crowd. A generation ago that observant evangelist Dwight L. Moody called Tremont Temple, because of its location, the best preaching station in America. Its ministers have usually been popular orators, as much at home on the platform as in the pulpit. The looks of the place suggests the concert hall. Indeed, all through the week the people go there to lectures, musical entertainments, and even the movies. The atmosphere on Sunday is not so very different from that of Saturday or Monday. To be sure, on Sunday twenty deacons in trim frock coats file onto the platform morning and evening with the pastor, Dr. Cortland Myers, but they are not so solemn that they cannot smile with the big audience when the preacher cracks a joke or even applaud when he indulges in sensational invectives against the city government or any offending official or private citizen who may be at the



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moment in the public eye. At Park Street Church, only a stones throw away from Tremont Temple, you find a no less evangelistic emphasis than at Tremont Temple but more dignity and no playing to the galleries. The temper of the service is earnest, sincere, straightforward. Old "Brimstone Corner," as it has been called for half a century, still stands for the old Gospel, but, as Dr. A. Z. Conrad meditates, expounds and embodies the persuasive note is louder than the dogmatic. Park Street, like Tremont Temple, draws its great audiences to a notable extent from the neighboring hotels and boarding-houses, though in the case of both the regular attendants include many who swarm from cities and towns all over Greater Boston.

Just a few steps farther down Tremont Street on any Sunday morning or evening you will find another congregation in size well on toward the thousand mark and often passing it. St. Paul's—the St. Paul's of an earlier day, when rectors like Vinton and Courtney were in their prime—has become during the last ten years the Cathedral church of the diocese, nobly fulfilling even in a structure not built with that in view the functions of a central ecclesiastical establishment in which the corporate life of the diocese finds ample and beneficent expression.

But it is not chiefly because St. Paul's has a ranking superior to that of other churches that people flock thither Sundays and week-days, but because Dean E. S. Rousmaniere has made it a religious power house where influence is not measured by its contribution to the strengthening of the

Episcopal Church in Massachusetts, but by its constant impact upon the life of the city and of the region. Dean Rousmaniere is a Low Churchman and cuts ecclesiastical corners whenever he pleases. He is not afraid to offer extemporaneous prayers, or to give out a Gospel song, or to condense the Scripture lessons of the morning into one reading. Nevertheless the service has a distinctively ritualistic quality and conforms in the main to the canons and rubrics of the Church. But forms and ceremonies do not smother the life of the spirit. That is fed almost continuously at St. Paul's through week-day classes in personal religion, prayer circles, and noon-day preaching services. St. Paul's is a pioneer in the use of certain cultural methods; it has a friendly feeling toward those who believe that Christianity can heal diseases, or at least greatly reduce their area and intensity. To put it tersely, St. Paul's specialty is religion.

At the Old South Church, on Copley Square, is to be seen every Sunday a congregation more fully representative of the brains, wealth, and culture of the city than any other congregation. Trinity and Emmanuel excepted, Judges of the Supreme Court, prominent lawyers, physicians, merchants, a host of teachers, and just now the Governor of the Commonwealth, listen week by week, to Dr. George A. Gordon, still, as for many years, the leader of the New England pulpit. Ushering is no easy task at the Old South since the spaces directly beneath the pulpit and the gallery stairs have often to be requisitioned in the interests of late comers. The service of worship, while by no means severe, shows

little in the way of the elaboration wrought out by some other churches of the Congregational persuasion. Apparently people go to Old South because they want to hear Dr. Gordon, to be invigorated by his broad, rugged faith, to be buoyed up by his optimism, to be refreshed by his unflinching good humor, to be enlightened concerning the great mysteries of life and death.

No such motive operates in the case of the thousands who attend the magnificent temple where the followers of Mary Baker Eddy assemble just to hear the Scripture and the week's readings from the text-book "of our revered leader." To the uninitiated, the casual dropper in at the Christian Science Mother Church, the hour—for that time limit is never exceeded—is likely to be a dull and even a dreary one. His temptation after gazing into the great vault and studying the adornment of pillars and ceiling and the legends on the walls will be to look around on those present and wonder just what brings them there Sunday after Sunday, Wednesday evening after Wednesday evening. The more one looks at them, the more they appear just like other people, just like the people he has seen at the four other crowded auditoriums. They really do not appear to be either cranks or dupes.

Thus much with regard to the material of our clinic. Now what are the conclusions? Only two at this time. One inference is that people go to church in Boston and elsewhere where other people go in considerable numbers and for a period of considerable length. A crowd draws a crowd. And the moral thereof is this: Locate your churches where they will be

easily accessible. Do not multiply edifices beyond a certain point. Locate a few at strategic points and make them large enough to hold at least a thousand people. Then get your crowd moving toward them.

But how? There is the rub. One thing is true of all the five churches whose types of service have been briefly described. They all provide something real and deep-going for those who frequent them. The individual accent is different. The theology or the philosophy which reigns in this or that one of the five might be abjured or at least severely criticized by others in the group. Nevertheless the religion which all are trying to defend and propagate is positive and relates itself to that which is deepest and best in every worshiper.

And the moral of their particular aspect of the whole matter is this. If you are going to open the doors of a church on a Sunday and invite people to enter, you must have something very definite, positive, and satisfying to offer them. And year in and year out nothing draws like religion.

Not long ago a belated man made the rounds of at least three of the five churches just characterized, only to find every seat taken. Not caring to stand for an hour, he started for his home. On the way he noticed several people ascending a stairway. He followed them into a small upper room, where he found a score of persons setting forth the reasons why people do not go to church. Had he ventured to tell them of his evening's experience they would have still clung to their misconceptions. For some people are never convinced and some discussions go on forever.

ADMINISTRATOR'S NOTICE.
Having qualified as administrator C. T. A. of the estate of Lucy T. Freeman, deceased, late of Franklin County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons having claims against said estate to present the same to the undersigned on or before the 19th day of July, 1922, or this notice will be plead in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said estate will please make immediate payment. This July 19th, 1921.
W. P. EDWARDS, Adm'r. C. T. A. of Lucy T. Freeman.
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E. B. SILLS,
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Administrators of Littleton Sills.
Wm. H. & Thos. W. Ruffin,
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