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—AT—

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Continued from page 3

iance, as being the most honorable thing to do in view of their personal convictions.

"There are others who, having no difficulties, nevertheless dismiss the church from their lives by reason of the pressure of other interests. They theoretically uphold the idea of righteousness, which they conceive to be the main contention of churches, and they approve of churches, as useful gifts in maintaining standards of right conduct, but they give no immediate personal allegiance to any church.

"Again there are those who believe that there are substitutes for organized Christianity. They find in lodges strong moral teaching and they find in social service the opportunity for personal endeavor. They believe themselves exempted from church affiliation. The church, so they believe, has nothing for them which they are not already receiving. This is a natural conclusion if the church is considered as a religious lodge with a sermon attached. But it shows a misapprehension of the purpose of the church.

"Again there are many men, yet young, who in their youth were subject to a discipline, often by parental authority, in Sunday school and church which was distateful and joyless. Not only were they taught doctrines which in later years they rebelled, but they were compelled to practices from which later they gladly escaped. Their freedom was pleasant to them. But they have carried to maturity a sense of reaction against the restrictions of their youth, and at the same time they have retained a false notion of what religion expects of them and a false idea of what they must accept in the name of religion. They look with respect upon their former condition but with no eagerness to renew it.

"Again there are many men who have had no particular religious experience or training, who distrust the church because of the prevailing notion that the churches are teaching and practicing meagre and joyless doctrines and habits. They have not been attracted by the general atmosphere surrounding religious worship. As a matter of fact they have been too ready to listen to criticisms of the church in order to justify their own aloofness.

"Again there are men who believe that they are not in the proper frame of mind to accept religion in its organized bodies. They honestly believe that they are not good enough, or that they have not had any particular religious experience. They see organized Christianity holding revivals and otherwise emphasizing the emotional nature of religious experience and they realize that such an experience is foreign to their nature.

"Again there are others who hold intellectual opinions which they take for granted are not approved by the churches. Men have difficulties about the Bible, about the doctrines of future punishment, and about scientific truths, which, they assume, would bar them from membership in the churches.

"With men of such condition of mind and temperament I have a real sympathy. I honor them for the integrity of their purpose. Without doubt there is much justification for their attitude and it would be unnatural for them to think otherwise. For the churches have not been without fault in these matters and have been responsible for such conditions. But they are emerging from the ancient tyranny and from the inadequate presentations to which their zeal prompted them and are enlarging the bounds of their sympathy.

"And of course there are men who have shrunk to lives of worldliness and sinfulness. Naturally they have no concern for the church. But it would be a most grievous error in judgment to assume that any large per cent of non-churchgoers are of this class."

"Dou you believe," asked the Judge, as the Rector paused, "that the church will again secure the allegiance of the majority of men?"

"It has already begun to do so, Judge," was the firm reply. "I believe that the church is adjusting itself to the temper of the day, and that men in large numbers are becoming interested in its new life and vision. I speak with absolute confidence when I say that the Episcopal Church in America has a most reassuring message to the men of this day. In its practices and teachings, in its expectations and in its loyalties the Church is sympathetic to the needs and conditions of modern life. Especially can it say to the men who are troubled by the difficulties mentioned above, that the Church respects those difficulties, because they express the attitude of right thinking and honorable men. Personally, I believe that the reluctance of men to assent to the persuasion of the churches has been vaulable in compelling the Church to grow to the measure and stature of those whose support and allegiance it seeks. The Episcopal Church will neither dishonor itself nor belittle the men whom it attempts to serve, by abandoning a single fundamental religious truth, but it does assert that those fundamental truths do not afford any real basis for such attitudes as have been described, and that its whole temper, its whole atmosphere, its traditional practices, its expectations, are such that reluctant men may find a true home and intellectual and spiritual satisfaction within its borders."

"In what respect, Rector, has the Episcopal Church a special message to men today?" asked the Doctor.

"In the first place, Doctor, the Episcopal Church is holding fast to the fundamentals of the Christian faith. Men today respect convictions. They are tired of the guesses and the surmises and the frothy imaginings and the cheap sensationalism of those who under the pretense of liberty to believe what one likes, are offering often trifling substitutes for the sound and tried conclusions of universal Christendom. Men do not want religion to be belittled and reduced to mere amiability. Life, death, sin, and sorrow, loom too large in human affairs for men to be indifferent to the fundamental truth of God about these things. The Episcopal Church presents the Gospel of Christ as a whole, and the Christian faith as a whole, and not in such fragments as may please the hearer. It is the Church of great affirmations.

"Again, the Episcopal Church is not burdened by the religious idiosyncrasies and eccentricities that have clouded religious truth ever since men began to form the countless sects. I have not the least doubt in the world that many men confuse the Christian faith with crude and obscure notions which they learned in childhood and have never outgrown. Recently a man said to me that he thought that if one belonged to a church he had to believe literally every word in the Bible, including the statements that the world was made in six days. The Bible is the Word of God, I assuredly maintain, and the expression of God's revelation to men, and a spiritual, religious and moral food and stimulus, but it has its human framework and the limitations of any revelation of God through human instruments. To believe as that man believed is to make the Bible a book of magic, or an idol. The Episcopal Church teaches the Bible truth but it demands the use of reason and of spiritual appreciation in gathering the central truths from the Bible. Upon its members it imposes no obligation whatever to assent to any theory as to how the Bible is the word of God, but the Church teaches the Bible truth and tries to enrich the lives of its people by the message of God therein.

"It is not necessary to hold a theory about the Bible. The Church has gleaned the fundamental religious truths from it and interprets them to the people. The Episcopal Church gives full intellectual freedom to its members.

"And this is another reason why the Episcopal Church is so satisfying to men of this day. There was a time when Christianity seemed to be committed to the denial of the scientific discoveries of the day, such as, for example, the principle of evolution. Many religious bodies adhere to that denial. But the Episcopal Church has grown in its intellectual sympathies with the scientific advances of the day, and it encourages the fullest possible use of the human intellect in its discovery of truth.

"Again, the Episcopal Church is committed to the principle of moral freedom. The Church is not the accuser and judge of the people, but their advocate and friend. The Church directs its effort toward forming sound judgment and spiritual insight in the people, and toward setting forth the moral and religious principles by which life must be controlled. But the Episcopal Church does not erect a set of rules governing conduct and bind the people to them. In this land there are several things that some churches have attacked with vehemence, such as card playing, dancing and the theatre. The Episcopal Church sets forth the moral principles by which conduct must be guided and then permits its people to apply these principles to all conduct, even such things as dancing and theatre going. Almost any permissible thing may be abused, but its proper use is not therefore to be prohibited.

"Again, the Episcopal Church respects the individuality and personality of men. The Church does not try to reduce every life to some commonplace sameness of experience and interest, but tries to encourage every life to enlarge and expand to its own destiny. Men differ in temperament, habits, environment. Some enjoy the intellectual aspects of Christianity, some the emotional, some the philanthropic. To attempt to recreate each temperament and to have some identical mediocrity is folly. The Church does not expect it. The Church realizes that some men want to know, some want to feel, some want to act. The Church ministers to each type and respects it. Some men have never experienced conversion, and have no profound emotions. But the Church is comprehensive and asks those of honest purpose to come within the sphere of its life and teaching, and to serve God with their gifts, whatsoever they may be. At the same time, the Church endeavors to cultivate the neglected portions of their nature, to bring to them an appreciation of all the elements of a well rounded Christian experience, fortified by a reasonable faith.

"Again, the Episcopal Church makes no man a hypocrite. A man may be a hypocrite by nature, but the Church does not make him one. I mean that the Church does not exact a profession from its members by which they later may be judged. The Church is not the judge but the friend.

"As a friend the Church is sympathetic. This sympathy extends to people in every circumstance of life and of every condition of heart. The Church desires to destroy sin but to save the sinner. Consequently, the doors are wide open to every one who has a will to turn to God for forgiveness or for direction. As a mother, she erects no barriers at the door by which to exclude any who desire the strength or the comfort the Church may give. The Church asks only honesty of purpose.

"Men have not always so understood Church affiliation. They have regarded Church allegiance as a profession of superiority in life or character. Men have been honest in their wish to decline an affiliation which implies that they have attained a righteousness which would pass muster at the Church door. Their reluctance to make such a profession is both natural and honorable. If Church membership is a badge of sainthood achieved they will not wear the badge.

"It is unfortunate that such a misconception has had some justification in religious societies. But the Episcopal Church asks for no such profession. As well might a college ask the entering student to profess profound scholarship. The student goes to college not because he has attained scholarship, but because he respects scholarship and would give himself the chance to attain it. The man enters the Church not because he has attained righteousness, but because he respects righteousness and would be within its influence.

"So far from being a profession of superior righteousness, it is a simple desire to grow into the life abundant, that is the inspiring avowal of every one who enters the Church. Let it be clearly understood that on this point the Church asks only honesty of purpose.

"Again, the Episcopal Church teaches the joy of life. Too often has the aspect of Christianity been dismal and gloomy. The Church knows that sorrow and pain and sin are part of humanity's burden, but it knows likewise that the message and power of the Church are directed toward assuaging sorrow, relieving pain, and cleansing lives from sin. The Church's message is joyous. It preaches good tidings. Therefore the attitude of the Church toward men is full of the joy of Christ. Consequently the Church emphasizes those occasions in which natural human joy has its expression. The Church is especially sympathetic and tender toward the young. It tries to fill their lives with joy and happiness.

"And this brings me to the Church's attitude toward amusements and recreation.

"The Church's ideal is to consider the whole of life as the subject of its care. Man is a unit, and all his activities affect his spiritual nature. Every current which sweeps into his life from any source modifies his deeper religious experience. Therefore, the Church is justified in scrutinizing every influence which affects its people.

"One of the most insistent appeals to all sorts and conditions of men is the attractiveness of amusement. This attractiveness has a sound basis in the real nature of men. Play for the child has been found to be not a mere diversion, but a real necessity for its mental and moral growth. Proper play for the individual, or really, the proper counter-balance for the more serious duties of life, is not mere frivolity but a tonic, a necessary ingredient of life for those who do not despise God's gifts of health and sanity.

"Most opportunities for diversion are not only commercialized but they are not free from objectionable features. Therefore any agency by which proper amusement can be provided under conditions not influenced by commercial considerations, is contributing to the wholesome upbuilding of character.

"The Episcopal Church, acting upon this conviction and with full knowledge of the conditions of modern life, often provides for its people the proper amusements and diversions conducted under careful supervision and with the strict intention of deepening the spiritual nature of those for whom it is caring. Such activities directed in proper channels and diverted from improper ones, have been found to free young people from a certain suspicion of the Church as antagonistic to the simple pleasures of youth. Young men and young women are permitted to meet for social diversions in which a high standard of mutual respect is upheld. The world itself, recognizes that the normal condition of society is for men and women to meet together and it would be folly to assume that the best ideals of the race are to be attained by preventing such association. Consequently, in their youth there must be an opportunity for young men and women to meet and respect each other. This mutual acquaintance soon brings keen judgment and the faculty of discrimination, and no boy or girl who has normal opportunities for meeting other boys or girls is going to be so quickly deceived as to the real worth of character in another as one who has not had such opportunities. Such acquaintance and companionship are affected by the environment in which it is maintained.

"It must not be supposed that the Church considers this the fulfillment of its mission. It is but one of the attempts of the Church to serve the real needs of the community. The real mission of the Church is never lost sight of, that is, to bring individuals into the Kingdom of God and to make them realize their personal relation to Jesus Christ as their Saviour. The Episcopal Church is not apprehensive of the effect of its social emphasis because it has its foundation most firmly rooted and does not distrust its people. It believes that social service is a natural outcome of its fundamental principles. Its whole structure is comprehensive and not exclusive.

"The Church's message truly presents the vision of that greater democracy for which the righteous nations of the earth are yearning. It is a democracy whose fundamentals are justice, righteousness and the abundant spirit of service that will secure for the people what no form of economic democracy will ever achieve. For nations seeking national and social salvation from the ills that afflict them, as well as for individuals, Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life. The Gospel of Christ is the only national Charter of Liberty that can guarantee national salvation, the only power equal to the task of exalting a nation. The Church presents this Gospel.

"And, finally," concluded the Rector, "the Episcopal Church has a supreme confidence in life. Life is God's gift, not His curse. This is God's world, not man's prison. Pain and sacrifice are here, but there are likewise joy and blessing.

"All these considerations appeal to men of today. The Church is slowly but surely bringing the men of today back to the satisfaction, the mental and moral stimulus, the keener valuations and more enduring riches of the Christian life."

(Concluded next week)


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