

The Fireside.

THE DISHONESTY OF CHURCHES, Etc.

BY "UNCLE JOHN."

Of course what I say ain't law an' gospel, unless it is law an' gospel. Just my sayin' it don't make it so. Now, if you want to see what my "etc." is you'll have to follow me till I get through.

"Dishonest churches?" Well, that's what I said, an' if it ain't that way, it looks that way, sure. Explain myself? Of course, an' I don't want to do anybody any injustice at all, an' won't if I can help it.

Now, what would you say of an individual who come around beggin', sayin' he was "at the end of his row," an' yet needed a lot more. Then the people turn in an' help that feller, an' find he has money to spend on all sorts of things, luxuries even. The whole community would be hard down on that feller, an' right, too. But what do you say of a church that would do the same thing? Here's that church at Blankville. It is weak in point of numbers, an' none of its members are to say "big" rich. Well, they wanted to build them a church, an' called on the Presbytery's committee for help, sayin' they was just not able to build without help. Then they turned to some of the bigger churches an' made the same plea. The impression was made that they was a strainin' every point to get 'em a church an' by the help of Presbytery's committee an' the churches, they got one near about done, when the World's Fair broke loose, an' what do you think? Them same beggin', poverty-stricken folks at Blankville had money enough to spend on goin' to the Fair. Yes, sir, they actually spent about as much on the Fair as the whole new church cost 'em. Such a thing as that looks to me like a violation not only of the ninth commandment, but of the one just in front of it. It would be considered that if it was an individual, I am sure, ain't you? A company of folks haven't any more right to get money by false pretenses than an individual.

I don't think that the church at Dashville is any better than the one at Blankville. They owe their preacher, an' are a gettin' deeper an' deeper into his debt. They talk like they think a heap of him, too, that is the most of 'em do, but they say they just can't pay a dollar more. It does look kind o' hard, because about five out of the two thousand members pay nearly half the salary that is paid, an' of the rest only fifty or sixty give anything at all. But at the same time these five are well able to give what they do an' not feel it. But I think that a feller hain't done his whole duty to the Lord till he's done all he's able to do, an' these same five spent not less than from \$600.00 to \$1,000.00 on the Fair, while all the rest of the church, includin' them that get what little preachin' they do get, by spongin' on others, spent more on the Fair than the whole salary of the preacher for a whole year, two or three times over.

This don't suggest what the Lord said: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself." No, sir, it don't look a bit like that. An' if the preacher was to do that way the merchants would help 'em kick, but they members would help 'em kick, but they would be of the sort that either prom-

ise an' never pay, or neither promise nor pay, kind o' like they had a free pass or some complimentary way to heaven.

But this ain't the only way churches do with the preachers' salaries, not by a big heap. The pastor didn't get enough to support his family while they were at Blankville. Of course everybody in the church expects him to be honest whether they give him enough to be honest on or not. And it makes no difference what people think of him. It is in his heart to be honest. Well, when he gets a call to Dashville, on a little better salary, he is crippled financially there by having to send money back to Blankville to pay for the privilege of having preached the gospel to them for a few years. I tell you there ain't a business in the world but this one of preaching that is conducted as it is. The church's method of finance is enough to keep the preacher's sons from ever thinking of being called to preach, and I believe it keeps lots of our young men out of the ministry, too. Nothing saps a man's manhood so much as to be dishonest, and the young men can't see how they can be honest and be preachers. It don't do a church any good, either, to be careless in its money obligations. What's good for the man is good for the many men when it comes to downright homespun honesty, which means a hundred cents on the dollar, and an adequate amount of dollars for the service rendered. That's my ticket to a "T."

You know, business men treat preachers as men, an' in business just as they do all other men. A man's a man to them, except that in most cases, the business men have the rule of donatin' ten per cent, or more, in each trade to the preachers and their families. If it was not for this ten per cent, the case would be far worse than it is. The preacher is also a business man. He generally knows what it takes, in the long run, to support his family, makes his calculations accordin' to the demand an' supply plan. The supply is the promise the church has made. But some member of the church gets miffed at the preacher when it may be he was most conscientiously an' prayerfully measurin' up to the obligations of his call. So he quits payin' right short off. Consequently the preacher an' his family have to suffer or go in debt because this feller did not continue to him that "competence" he promised as long as this man was his pastor. He excuses himself, but, if he is a merchant an' the pastor has a bill there, he is very apt to collect it, an' if he has to wait, he may have somethin' to say about other folks' honesty. His own does not seem to concern him. Maybe he hasn't much to be worried or anxious about. But the preacher—why, he has just simply got to be honest an' square, regardless of his income or outgo. Of course it won't do for him to be dishonest. It won't pay. He can't afford it. How about the members of the church? But that's different.

Here comes my "etc." I heard that over yonder in Cityville was a family that had lots of money, an' made it fast, an' the head was liberal, but he died. The business went on just the same. The income was just as good as it had been before, an' yet not a dollar went out of that house to the preacher's salary, any more'n if they'd a become

as poor as Job's turkey. He'd been a-countin' on that money, too. But what could he do now? He was as helpless as a babe, an' he felt all the more keenly because this family kept up their style of living just the same. They took their long trips, went to the Fairs, etc. An' the poor disappointed preacher! Well, let's not draw the curtain aside and reveal his sorrows. My "etc." has two chapters in it. For some reason or another, I went once to Villaburg, a nice big town, with a strong church. There was a family that had been in better circumstances, but claimed now to be unable to give anything to the church. At the same time three or four of the youngsters went into society, an' that spells money, an' lots of it. There were several of the children that had positions of different sorts, an' the income of that family was not less than \$2,500, and maybe more than that. Society, trips to the World's Fair, luxuries an' all sorts of pleasures cost money. I know that; but don't you think it would be nearer the truth an' certainly more honest just to come out an' say "I won't give," than to say, "I am not able to give," especially when things are as they are? It looks to me that way?

None of these plans would begin to work in the commercial world. Men would soon pounce on this sort of conduct and call it downright dishonest. That's what they would beyond a doubt, but does the fact that it is done by churches or individuals in the churches make it right?

Now, I am not near so much against the World's Fair as I am against dishonesty. If I ain't hit the nail on the head, I would ask some one that knows more about it than I do to rise up and explain.—*Christian Observer.*

HE SUSPENDED THE RULE.

The young man admitted that he had children, and the real estate man frowned and shook his head.

"We are very particular in regard to that building," he said at last, "and I am afraid I can not let you have the flat."

"I am very sorry," returned the young man meekly, "and it seems rather hard that a man should be made to suffer for what's no fault of his own, but I suppose it can't be helped."

The real estate man looked surprised. "You see," explained the young man, "I wasn't given a fair chance, for I was never told in my younger days that it was wrong to have children, or that there was any penalty attached. I supposed it was all perfectly natural and proper, but I presume the enormity of the offence is fully explained in all the schools now—"

"Really, I—"

"Then I had a very bad example set me right in the family," interrupted the young man, "for my parents had children. It seems remarkable, doesn't it? But it's the fact, and they were held to be very estimable people, too. I was taught to revere them, and naturally I fell into the error of supposing that there was nothing unlawful or opposed to public policy about it, and so I married; and now I find myself in such disrepute that I can't get the kind of a flat I want. I suppose it's all right, but you must admit that it seems rather hard on a man who has always aimed to be a good citizen."

"My dear sir, you—"

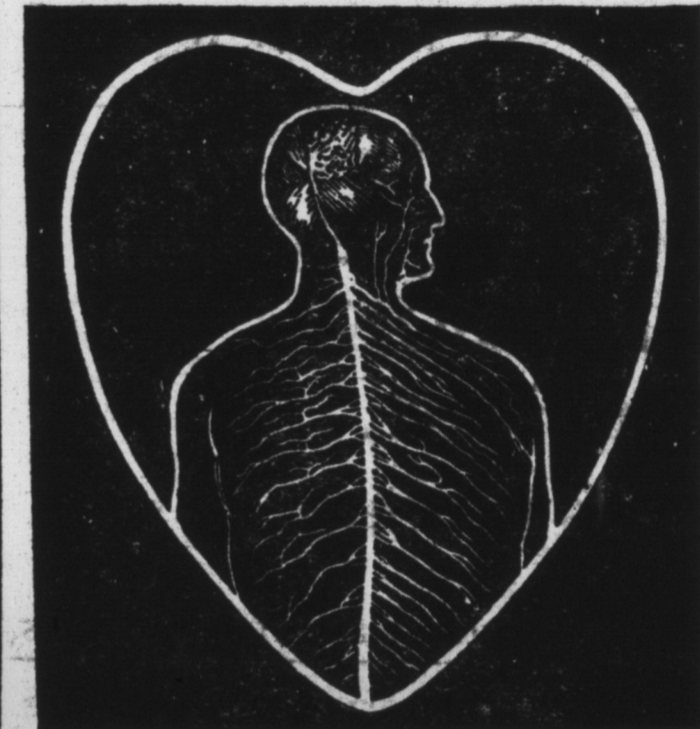
"Now I think of it," broke in the young man again, "I suppose your parents were guilty of the same offense,

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I do not see how you can successfully deny it. Now, sir, I would like to ask you if you think it fair for a man to expect his tenants to be more acceptable than his parents?"

"I was about to say when you interrupted me," returned the agent, "that under the circumstances -I am prepared to suspend the rule regarding children, and let you have the flat."—*New York Times.*

Never trifle with one sin. It is like a little cloud which, as the poet has said, may hold a hurricane in its grasp. The next sin you commit may have a mighty effect in the blighting of your life. You do not know the streams that may flow from the fountain; for sin is a fountain—not a mere act, but a fountain of evil.—*Andrew A. Bonar.*

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