

EMPTY SEATS

"Are you going to church this morning, Susie?" asked Dr. Clark, lying back in his easy chair with the morning paper. "A doctor who is out day and night, can't be expected to."

"No, I made jell yesterday, and I'm tired. I'm faithful enough to stay at home this cloudy morning," and Mrs. Clark curled up on the couch with the Bible she had not opened for a week, but it soon dropped from her hand. She was aroused by a strange voice saying:

"Now, my imps, what have you done today to weaken the Kingdom of God?"

The voice came from a suspicious-looking personage seated on a throne of human skulls. Around him was gathered a crowd of terrible beings, each with a crown of fire, in which gleamed some name, such as Malice, Envy, Pride, Hatred, and kindred passions.

"We have been busy today making empty seats in churches," began one.

"Nothing could please me better," answered their king.

"I persuaded one man that he had a headache, and kept him from a sermon that might have changed his old life," said one.

"I induced one good man to slip down to his store and fix up his books," said another with a horrible grin.

"Good," said the king. "He'll soon give up Sunday altogether."

"I was able to get one devoted young man to visit old friends," said one imp.

"I worried one good sister about her old bonnet until she decided to stay at home until she got a new one," spoke up the imp labeled "Pride."

"And I made several poor women, who were hungry for God's Word, stay at home to repine over the trials, I just said to them, 'Oh, those rich people don't care for you; you can't wear fine clothes, so I would not go where I was looked down upon.'" He continued: "That way I kept many poor at home whom the rich would have been glad to see."

"That is one of the best ways to cheat people out of Heaven that I know of," answered the king with approval.

"I induced a good many men and women to think that they are not strong enough to go out," said one called "Indifference." "Of course, all these men will be at their business places tomorrow, even if they feel worse. But they would not go to church, where they would have been able to clean house or go calling, but I made them think they couldn't walk to church unless they were perfectly well."

"Very good," said the king, with a sulphurous grin. "Sunday headaches might often be cured by getting out in the air, and backaches forgotten by the thoughts drawn to higher things. But you lying imps use every weakness of the flesh to help make empty seats."

They all smiled, for in their kingdom "lying" was a great compliment.

"I have a way of keeping people home from church, and they feel perfectly innocent about it," said one. "I induce people to have company or go visiting on Sunday. Of course, this takes their mind off sacred things to begin with, and puts them on dressing and eating. Servants, mothers, and older sisters have to stay at home to get big dinners. Many of the guests miss church to be on time for dinner."

"Anything to make empty seats," approved the king. "These people cannot be tempted by Sunday

excursions, but they miss God's house just as easy in this way."

"To make ladies feel that their servants need no Sunday privileges is good," suggested one.

"Very true," said his superior. "As long as we can get Christian people to cause or allow men and women to work during their church hours we can keep many empty seats in churches, and men and women away from God."

"I am the weather imp," said one gloomy fellow. "I go around persuading people it is going to rain, or it is too cold, too damp, or too hot to venture out to church. It is enough to make even your gloomy majesty laugh to see these same people start out the next day in wind and weather. One would think it a sin to carry umbrellas and wear gum coats to church."

"Confidentially," answered the king, "when I find a Christian who has no more concern about the weather on Sunday than Monday—determined to make as much effort for spiritual gain as he would for worldly profit—I just give him up. It's no use to try to drag back the man or woman who goes to God's house in all kinds of weather."

"I'm able to do a good deal with some of the ladies of the congregations," spoke up the imp labeled, "Fashion of this World." "I can make some stay at home because the new hat did not come, or because their clothes are out of style, or they have not got a new cloak."

"I have a better scheme than that," said another. "These people you keep away are indifferent—generally good-for-nothing folks who are hardly worth getting into the kingdom of his satanic majesty, but I have a plan that empties seats of the workers in the church."

"That's just what I want," said the king.

"I make these people overwork on Saturday. For instance, get some good man the preacher depends on, or some devout Sunday-school teacher, to make Saturday the busiest day in the week. I just keep him rushed with neglected things till late at night, and then he over-sleeps or is sick the next day, and can't get out, or, if he goes, is too tired and sleepy to take part or even listen."

"Splendid plan," cried Satan.

"Yes, it works well with delicate women. If they clean house, or have Saturday night company, they can be kept home without knowing that they have desecrated the Lord's Day the day before. A church party late Saturday night helps with empty seats."

"You are doing finely, my imp," his majesty said, warmly—for his breath was a flame of fire. "Preachers may work and pray over their sermons all the week, but there will be no results in preaching to empty seats. One of the most important things we have to consider is how to keep people away from churches on Sunday. Your plans are excellent, but I might suggest another good point. All preachers have human imperfections—some fault of manner or speech. Get Christians to criticize their pastor, especially before their children. This keeps young people from wanting to be church members. If you can stir up a spirit of faultfinding against the preacher or among the members, it will help make empty seats. People who get mad at each other do not care to go to church together. If the seats are empty, the minister may be a saint and preach like an angel to no purpose. See the result of your labor—on— Street church today. Half the seats were empty. Not only did the two

MISSIONARIES AT HOME

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How we all wish we were privileged to be on the front lines in missionary work! But most of us are going to have to stay at home. Some of us, I fear, never could be real missionaries on a foreign field according to the way we work for the Lord at home.

We think when we get to a field by some miracle we would be flooded with warm love for souls and a zeal to win them to Christ. But back here in our home town it doesn't matter to us what heartaches and burdens our nearest neighbors are bearing. Lord help us! Are we Christians or are we not?

Perhaps the best way for our churches and bands to learn the real spirit of missions would be for us all to ask God for a new baptism of love for our nearest neighbors. Lately several messages in church have stirred our hearts. How easy it is to excuse ourselves for our self-centered living. We say, "We're too busy—too busy working for the Lord—to take time for the people around us. It would interrupt our program to visit a sick friend or to invite to dinner a lonesome neighbor."

I wonder sometimes what is most important in the eyes of Jesus, our program or needy hearts right near us? An old gentleman was about to move from a community in which he had lived for years. Some friends had him in for a meal. He seemed extra grateful for so small a favor. "You see," he said, "I have been invited out for a meal only once before in this community. I appreciate this kindness." And there were many good Christians in that town.

Now just check on yourself. How good a missionary are you right here at home? There are not many years for us to live. If we keep putting off true missionary endeavor for some future time, we'll find our lives over with nothing vital accomplished for the kingdom.

Missionaries? We can be missionaries right here and now, by His help.—Wesleyan Missionary.

hundred people who stayed at home lose a blessing, but each empty seat did its work against the Lord's Kingdom. The preacher made an unusual preparation, and went with his heart on fire, but the empty seats chilled him, and he did poorly. Several strangers had dropped in with letters, but they were disappointed at the small attendance, and took their letters home, and some will not take them to any place. There was special collection, but the best givers were away, so it was a failure. It isn't a smart teacher, or a rich congregation, or a good location, or a paid choir that makes a successful church. It is the church members always being there that draws in the unconverted and makes an eloquent preacher. As soon as a Christian begins to stay at home, from one excuse or another, I know I have a mortgage on his soul, which if he does not shake off, I will foreclose on the judgment day.

"You have none on mine," cried Mrs. Clark, who had been listening with bated breath; "I'll go to church if only to defeat you."

"What's the matter, dear?" asked the doctor. "Have you been dreaming?"

"Perhaps so, but I'm going to church if I get my seat just in time for the benediction. I'll cheat Satan this day out of one empty seat."—Tract.