

THE CHURCH AND THE PEOPLE

EDITORIAL BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT

IN theory it is quite unnecessary to say that a church is made for people and not people for a church. In practice, in all our great cities, we find, especially among the Protestant denominations, that when masses of people move into a neighborhood the churches tend to move out; that churches are fewest in the very districts where the population is densest. In New York City there are any number of churches in the rich, spacious residence regions, and at the same time in the older portions of the

city church after church has been abandoned as those regions became settled by a dense population who work with their hands and live in tenement-houses. I do not suppose that any human being will in theory maintain that such a condition is right or healthy. But in practice it has proved very difficult to prevent it.

We need to have our Christianity made what it originally was, a religion primarily for the people as a whole; and, while it should meet the religious needs of every

class, yet most of all should it keep in view the needs and hopes and desires and lives of those whom Abraham Lincoln called "the plain people." In the past this has been measurably true in our country districts, although even in many of our country districts where the population has declined there is urgent need of active and intelligent work, such as has already been begun, to put the country church and the country Young Men's Christian Association and similar institutions in the forefront of the movement for the betterment of country conditions. In the big cities, where the conditions are such as were entirely unknown to the founders of this Republic, church work has never been on a really satisfactory basis.

But most emphatically it can be put on a satisfactory basis. In such matters an ounce of performance is worth a ton of preaching. As instances there may be mentioned a couple of places right here in New York where there has been a good deal more than an ounce of performance: the Bowery Mission of the Holy Name, under Father Rafter, and, on Second Avenue, the Labor Temple, of which the superintendent is the Rev. Charles Stelzle. It would be quite out of the question in any brief article even to outline the admirable work that is being done in these two places. In *The Outlook* for July 22, 1911, Mr. Stelzle has described the work of the Labor Temple. Any one who will communicate with him, or with Father Rafter, 227 Bowery, New York City, will be able to get full information about what is being done. These men and their associates are spending all their strength in disinterested work which is not only for the benefit of those immediately concerned, but immensely for the benefit of all of us who dwell in this Republic. Naturally, they are not men of means. Father Rafter is a priest, who of course has no fortune; Mr. Stelzle is an ex-machinist, a former wage-worker and member of a labor union, to whom the Labor Temple is the realization of a dream of his machinist days, when he felt the biting need of just such a religious enterprise as that which he is now superintending. These two men and their associates are doing a very great work, and they will continue to do it; but surely genuinely philanthropic men of means who are interested in the welfare of their kind—not only in the welfare of the wage-workers, but in the welfare of our Nation—should give them the heartiest financial backing. In no

other way could a man of means use his money more wisely and with greater certainty of its doing far-reaching good.

When I visited the Holy Name Mission in the Bowery, situated in an utterly inadequate house, I found the lower hall jammed with men. With most of them it was evident that life had gone hard, and yet it was equally evident that most of them were at bottom good men and only needed the chance that it was sought to give them. Father Rafter unconsciously gave me the key to his work when, in asking me to speak a few words to those assembled, he added: "Let them be words of encouragement and friendship, and of comradeship." His effort has been not only to give comfort to bruised souls but to care for the body, and to help each man in the only practical way, by helping him to help himself. Wherever he can he tries to help the man to get employment. Above the main hall upstairs there are rooms which can be used as club-rooms. There were half a dozen men in these rooms who had been asked to meet me, and two of these illustrated by their presence the broad, non-sectarian spirit in which the work is being done. Catholic and Protestant and Jew are received alike; and if the Protestants and Jews can be reached by religious appeal, the endeavor is made to get them in touch with some Protestant pastor or Jewish rabbi.

Among the visitors upstairs was a young Jewish policeman, a member of the mounted squad, who was taking an immense interest in the mission, largely because Father Rafter had once stood by him on an occasion when he needed support. He had brought with him his brother, a medical student whom he was himself educating out of his salary as policeman. Naturally, I have a strong feeling of affection for the members of the New York police force, and I was both pleased and amused to find that the young policeman, who had come on the force long after I left, knew many of the "Roosevelt cops," and was eagerly anxious to show me that he was familiar with various stories and traditions connected with my management of the force; of how I selected an ex-man-of-war's-man named Burke, now a captain, and made him a roundsman within a month of his joining the force, on account of the summary way he put a stop to the lawbreaking of one "King" Callahan, and of how this same Burke, when the war with

Spain occurred, took a holiday of six months in order to return to the navy, in which he served gallantly and efficiently as captain of a gun; of how I had appointed Otto Raphael, a young Russian Jew, whom I got from the Bowery Branch of the Young Men's Christian Association, my attention having been called to him by his gallantry in saving life at a fire—the result of his appointment being that he not only educated his brothers and sisters, but actually got over to this side one or two relatives who had been left in Russia. Indeed, I could have spent an hour or two listening to his accounts of the past and present of "the force." Our people must make no mistake; the New York police are a very fine body of men. No trouble has ever come in connection with them when they have been handled aright. Like the men of the Fire Department, the policemen are men to whom their fellow-citizens owe much, and they represent a fine type of citizenship.

At the Labor Temple I found Mr. Stelzle giving a curious and most interesting proof that the right type of church can successfully meet the religious needs of the people in the crowded working quarters of our great cities. The Labor Temple was formerly a church of the usual kind. Its congregation diminished steadily until it became evident that it was not worth while keeping up the church at all unless there was a complete change of attitude and activity on its part. The conventional type of church activity, which entirely satisfies certain congregations and meets their needs, was wholly ineffectual in the face of the actual conditions of the neighborhood. At this moment, when the church was about to be abandoned, Mr. Stelzle stepped in and asked to be allowed to try the experiment of conducting the church literally as a labor temple, a temple in which the working people should feel the sense of possession, of proprietary right, and where both the preaching and the practice should be aimed at actually grappling with and remedying what was evil in social life, at supplying what was lacking not only spiritually but materially.

On Sundays there are almost continuous services, song playing a great part in them; and the singing is done by men and women who work hard for their daily bread, and who are glad in addition thus to give their time and talents to the service of others. The keynote of the Labor Temple is social service. The spirituality, taught not only by precept but by example, is both broad and deep; and I was interested to find that not only were men of all Christian creeds present, but also many men and women of Jewish faith. All were able to work together, earnestly and zealously, to meet the social needs with which all were familiar. Whether the church activity takes the form of warring against vice and the instruments that pander to vice, or of warring for better conditions in tenement-houses, or of endeavoring to get higher wages for the men and women who work, or of endeavoring to get a higher standard of individual and family life among the workers—no matter what the form of work, equal zeal is put into it. The preaching and ministering are aimed not only to care for the sore at heart, the broken in spirit, but also to try to benefit bodily conditions.

It is no small thing to have as the pastor a man who was a member of a labor union, a toiler who worked with his hands, a man who sympathizes with the desires and needs of his people because they have been and still are his own desires and needs. It is hard to benefit men from whom we are sundered by aloofness of spirit. The best work must be done by men whose sympathies are so broad and keen as literally to give fellow-feeling, and the understanding that can come only from fellow-feeling. Such fellow-feeling means a realization of the fundamental equality of all of us in need, in shortcoming, in aspiration—in short, in the fundamental things of our common brotherhood. When, added to this fellow-feeling, this broad and tender understanding and sympathy, there are power, courage, and rugged common sense, then, and then only, is it possible to give the spiritual aid and social service which the Labor Temple is now giving.