

Harold Bell Wright



*God and
the Groceryman*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I DAN MATTHEWS

CHAPTER II BIG DAN'S PROBLEM

CHAPTER III THE GROCERYMAN

CHAPTER IV A STRANGER IN WESTOVER

CHAPTER V THE GROCERYMAN'S DAUGHTER

CHAPTER VI PAST AND PRESENT

CHAPTER VII ONE EVENING

CHAPTER VIII THE FARM

CHAPTER IX MR. SAXTON'S DINNER PARTY

CHAPTER X SUNDAY

CHAPTER XI GEORGIA RETURNS HOME

CHAPTER XII TRAGEDY

CHAPTER XIII GETTING TOGETHER

CHAPTER XIV NEW VALUES

CHAPTER XV IN AN UPPER ROOM

CHAPTER XVI THE PLAN

CHAPTER XVII MOTHER AND DAUGHTER

CHAPTER XVIII BUILDING THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER XIX WORSHIP

CHAPTER XX HAPPINESS

CHAPTER I

DAN MATTHEWS

Table of Contents

IN a suite of offices high up in the Union Mining Building in Kansas City, an old negro janitor was engaged in his humble evening tasks. Save for this ancient colored man the rooms were deserted. The place was unmistakably a center of large business interests. The dark, rich woods of the paneled wainscoting, heavy moldings, polished desks, and leather upholstered chairs, the bronze fixtures, steel filing cases, and massive vault door, all served to create an atmosphere of vast financial strength.

It was an evening in spring—one of those evenings when the cold discomforts of winter are far enough in the past to be forgotten while the hot discomforts of summer are so far in the future that no one need think of them. From homes and hotels and boarding houses, from apartments and tenements and rooms, the people were going forth to their pleasures and their crimes or to the toil of those who must labor in the night. Roaring street cars, screeching fire engines, clanging gongs, blaring horns, heavy murmuring undertone of the city's life. Brilliantly illuminated restaurants, gleaming show windows, glittering, winking, flashing electric signs, dazzling arc lights, shadowy alleys, dark doorways, nooks and corners. Mighty rivers of hurrying, crowding, dodging pedestrians. Vociferous newsboys, furtive drabs with shame to sell, stolid merchants, slinking

followers of nefarious trades, nurses, clergymen, sly beggars, laughing merrymakers, purveyors of vice, children, impassive policemen. As the old colored man with broom and dust cloth moved about the quiet office rooms he crooned the wailing melody of an old-time hymn.

Suddenly the old negro ceased his crooning song. Without straightening up from his stooping position over the desk which he was polishing he paused in an attitude of rigid alertness much like a good pointer dog, his gray woolly head cocked attentively to one side. It came again—the heavy, jarring rumble of distant thunder. Shuffling to the nearest window the old man looked into the night. Below him the city stretched away in the gloom like a dark, unfathomable sea. The shadowy masses of the higher buildings were misty headlands, the twinkling lights were stars reflected in the black depths, and the noise of the streets came up to him like the roar of the surf. A flash of lightning ripped the night and he saw the wind-tossed clouds.

“By Jack, hit sure am a-comin’,” the old man muttered nervously. “Yas sah—reg’lar ol’ rip-snorter—Bam! Lissen at dem hebenly guns! Lawdy—Lawdy! Dem big black clouds am sure a-pilin’ up—whoo-ee! Look lak de jedgment day am here right now—hit sure do. I knowed my ol’ rheumatiz warn’t lyin’ nohow—*No* sah—*No sah!*” He turned from the window and as his eyes took in the familiar rooms a wide grin deepened the wrinkles in his old, black face. “Ol’ man storm, he ain’t nohow gwine come in dese here offerces though—no *sah!* Rumble an’ grumble an’ shoot yo’ ol’ lightnin’ and blow yo’ ol’ wind twell yo’-all bus’ yo’sef—yo’-

all ain't gwine git ol' Zac in here—no *sah!* Dem pore folkses outside, dey sure gwine ketch hit, though—yas indeedee—dey sure *am!*” Wagging his head sorrowfully he again stooped over the desk.

But scarcely had the old negro resumed his work when again he was interrupted. This time he jerked himself erect and faced about with a quick movement surprising in one of his years. Some one had entered the outer office. A moment later a man appeared in the open doorway of the room where the janitor stood.

“Good evening, Uncle Zac.” The man was smiling at the expression of the old servant’s face.

“Ev’nin’, boss—ev’nin’, Mista Matthews, sah.” He bobbed and grinned with genuine delight. “But what fo’ de lan’s sake fetches you down here at yo’ offerces dis time o’ night? An’ hit a-fixin’ to storm like all git out, directly, too. Lissen dar!” An ominous roll of thunder punctuated his remark.

“Does look like it meant business, doesn’t it?” Dan agreed, moving to the nearest window.

“Hit sure do, sah—hit sure do. An’ iffen you’ll ’scuse me, sah, yo’ ain’t got no call to be a-comin’ down town on er wil’ night like dis gwine be. Yo’ jes’ better hustle ’long back home, right now, fo’ de storm break. Yo’ kin tell Missus Hope ol’ Uncle Zac jes’ naturally discharged yo’ an’ yo’ quit.” He chuckled at the thought of discharging the boss, and Dan laughed with him.

“Why don’t *you* run home before the storm breaks, Uncle Zac?”

“Me? Me go home dis early? Why, Mista Matthews, sah, I ain’t *near* finish ma work yet.”

“My fix exactly,” returned Dan.

Another blinding flash of lightning was followed by a crashing peal of thunder. The old negro regarded his employer with an expression of proud hopelessness, the while he nodded his head solemnly. “Man’s work ain’t nebbah gwine be finish, I reckon—no sah—not when he’s that kin’ of man.”

Twenty years had passed since Judge Strong and his brother officials of the Strong Memorial Church in Corinth drove Dan Matthews from the ministry because he would not preach the kind of Christianity they wanted. But the years had worked little outward change in this son of Young Matt and Sammy Lane. “Big Dan,” he had been called in his backwoods home, and the name bestowed with so much admiration and affection by the Ozark mountaineers clung to him still. Not only to his intimate friends but to his employees—laborers, miners, officials, clerks, to the newsboys on the street, and to the kings of Big Business he was still Big Dan. True, there were touches of gray in the shaggy, red-brown hair. The sensitive mouth smiled not quite so readily, perhaps. But the brown eyes—his mother’s eyes—were still clear and steady and frank, with Sammy’s spirit looking out, questioning but unafraid. One knew instinctively that his nickname was not used in reference to his great body and powerful limbs, alone. The years had given him, too, a certain quiet air of authority—of responsibility and power. In that place of large business interests he was as a captain on the bridge of his ship, or a locomotive engineer in the cab of his engine.

“Missus Hope, she am well as allus, sah?”

“Very well, thank you, Uncle Zac.” Dan came and seated himself on a corner of a desk near the janitor. “She was asking about you at dinner this evening. I expect she’ll be going to see you and Aunt Mandy before long.”

The old negro’s face beamed with pride and delight. “Thankee, thankee, sah. Lawd bless her dear heart. Mus’ be mighty lonesome fo’ yo’ an’ Missus Hope, all ’lone in yo’ big house wi’ de boys an’ lil’ Misse Grace erway to dey schools an’ colleges.”

“It is that,” agreed Big Dan, “but I guess we’ll have to stand it, Uncle Zac. I suppose, next thing we know, we’ll wake up some morning and find that we are grandparents.”

“Go ’long wid yo’! Shoo! Hit warn’t more dan yest’day yo’ oldes’, Masta Grant, war a-layin’ in he cradle makin’ funny faces at ol’ Uncle Zac.”

They laughed together. Then Dan, with the same courtesy he would have shown one of his business associates, asked: “How are your folks, Uncle Zac? Aunt Mandy feelin’ pretty pert these days?”

“Sure am, sah. Ol’ woman feelin’ so persnickety almost kick up her heels an’ prance roun’ like yearlin’ filly, sted o’ behavin’ like ol’ work mare wid her chilluns all growed up an’ mighty nigh ready to be gran’pappies an’ gran’mammies theyselves.”

“Good for Aunt Mandy! And how are you making out with your old friend, rheumatiz?”

“Ben makin’ out fine, sah, twell las’ night, ol’ man rheumatiz he come roun’ prognosticatin’ this here storm.”

“That’s too bad. I’m sorry, Uncle Zac. Perhaps you had better lay off for—”

“No, sah—no, *sah*. Ain’t nobody gwine ‘tend yo’ offerces but me, Mista Dan. Rheumatiz, he ain’t so *bad*, nohow—jes’ sort o’ weather projectin’. Ain’t hurt *much*. No rheumatiz in ma soul yet. Everythin’s all hunky-dory long ’s rheumatiz stay in man’s lags. Rheumatiz gits in de soul—whoo-ee—look out *den!* *Yas, sah—yas, sah—dat am bad!*”

“Well, there is nothing the matter with your soul, Uncle Zac.” Big Dan’s hand dropped gently on the toil-bent shoulders and the brown eyes of the boss looked smilingly down into the janitor’s wrinkled, upturned face. “It’s one of the cleanest, truest, whitest souls I know.”

“What’s dat, sah?” The old negro gazed at his employer with startled eagerness. “What’s dat yo’ sayin’, Mista Dan? White? Yo’ reckon ol’ nigger man like me can hab white soul?”

“Why not, Uncle Zac?”

The old man wiped his eyes with a corner of his dust cloth.

“Lawdy, Lawdy, Mista Dan, to think o’ yo’ sayin’ a thing like dat! White—Lawdy, Lawdy!”

“Well, Uncle Zac, I must get to work.” Dan crossed the room toward his private office.

“Yas, sah—yas, sah—we bof o’ us got to work.” With sudden energy Uncle Zac applied his dust cloth to the nearest piece of furniture. “Ol’ man storm, he gwine git to work too—mighty sudden now. Can’t cotch us in dis here place, though—no indeedee!”

“Mr. Saxton will be along presently. Tell him to come right on in, please.”

“Yas, sah—yas, sah.”

As the door closed behind Big Dan, Uncle Zac stood looking after him. "Ain't dat jes' like him now," he muttered to himself. "Ain't dat jes' like him to think o' a thing like dat? White—white—Praise de Lawd!"

The old negro janitor stooped vigorously to his task and again the distant roar of the city was accompanied by the crooning melody of an old-time hymn.

CHAPTER II

BIG DAN'S PROBLEM

[Table of Contents](#)

DAN MATTHEWS, alone in his private office, did not sit down to any work. Standing before his big desk, he idly fingered a silver paper knife, pulled open a drawer, closed it again, pulled open another drawer and took out a paper, glanced at it and put it back. The flashes of lightning were almost continuous now while the jarring roar of the accompanying thunder told that the storm was near. Big Dan turned from his desk to pace thoughtfully up and down the heavily carpeted room. As he moved to and fro one might have thought that he was nervous because of the threatening elements. He went to the window and stood looking out over the city—homes, churches, dens of vice, shops and factories, stores, retreats where criminals hide, houses of shame, dance halls, theaters, night schools, police stations, tenements, the black night, the play of lightning, the crash of thunder, the fury of the wind-torn clouds.

The door opened.

Glancing over his shoulder, Dan greeted the man who stood on the threshold with a brief: "Hello, John," and absorbed in his thoughts, turned his face again toward the city and the storm. Evidently the relationship between himself and the newcomer was so close and so well established that a more elaborate welcome was

unnecessary. The man closed the door behind him noiselessly.

John Saxton was about the age of his employer, and while he was not nearly so imposing in stature as Big Dan, his personality, in a way, was as striking. The quiet inner strength of the man was unmistakable. One felt instinctively that he was rich in experience beyond most men and that his judgments of men and events would always be governed by that large charity without which even justice is impossible. While in general appearance he was clearly a man of large business affairs, his face was the face of one who had suffered deeply and in his eyes there was that brooding look which is so characteristic of those who, even in a crowded world, live much alone.

Without turning his head, Dan called: "Come here, John—come look at this." And Saxton went to stand beside his chief.

For some time the two men watched in silence. Then Dan spoke. "I'm sorry, John, to bring you out on such a night; but I'm leaving for New York early in the morning and this is really my only opportunity to go over that business with you. It's lucky you returned to-day."

"I am very glad to come," returned the other quietly. He took a sheaf of papers from his pocket. "I have my report here, whenever you are ready."

Something in John Saxton's voice—a suggestion of loneliness, perhaps, seemed to touch Big Dan, or it might have been that the storm had thrown him into a peculiar mood. Turning from the window, he looked full into his companion's face. "John, do you know that you are almost

the only man left to keep my faith in humanity alive? I have always found it easy to believe in God but these last few years it has been mighty hard, at times, for me to believe in men. You have always held me up. You are the only man who has never failed me. I am not speaking merely of business, John—you understand, don't you?"

The other fumbled over the papers which he held in his hands. "It is like you to forget the circumstances under which we met—I—it was just such a night as this"—His voice broke and he went quickly to a table where he spread out his papers and bent over them as if seeking a particular sheet. In reality he was trying to hide his deep emotion. When he spoke again his voice was steady. "I think I have everything you wanted me to get."

Dan, with an effort, returned in a matter-of-fact tone, "All right, John, we'll go over what you have there presently. But first, if you don't mind, there are some things I wish to say. Before we go any farther I must be dead sure that you understand exactly what it is that I want to do, and why."

Big Dan dropped into the chair before his desk and Saxton, seating himself, waited while his employer seemed to be arranging his thoughts.

Slowly, with long pauses at the end of every sentence, as if speaking more to himself than to the man who listened so intently, Dan began: "It was just twenty years ago this month that I decided to develop the mine in old Dewey Bald Mountain. We took out the first ore three months later. Father and mother owned Dewey Bald long before I was born. They knew that enormous deposit of mineral was there. It wasn't a guess, they could see it—thousands of

tons—in the big cave where the Old Shepherd’s son died. But they would never touch it for themselves.

“Father and mother had received from the Old Shepherd, my namesake, some ideas of life and Christianity that were different from the ideas of established church members generally. Born and raised as I was, it was natural, I suppose, that I should feel called to the ministry, but there were no churches in that section of the Ozarks in my boyhood days. The only Christianity I knew was the Christianity of the Old Shepherd of the hills—the Christianity of my father and mother. All my life, up to the time I entered college, mother was my only teacher.

“But in that denominational college I was taught, of course, the history and doctrines of the denomination with which I became identified. Then when I took up my work as pastor of the Memorial Church at Corinth I found that the church in actual operation was quite a different thing from the simple Christianity of my backwoods home and the theoretical church of the college and seminary. It is no wonder that Judge Strong and the others drove me from the ministry. I was a down-and-out failure.” There was a note in Big Dan’s voice which told how deep had been the hurt of that experience.

Saxton made as if to speak, but the other motioned him to wait.

“But, you see, I still had father and mother and Hope, and with them to help I simply couldn’t let go of Christianity. And so, believing as I did that all work which truly serves humanity is God’s work, and that a man’s ministry is whatever he can do best for the best life of his fellow men, I

entered what Hope calls the Ministry of Business. I undertook the development of the Dewey Bald Mine with the idea of making it my contribution to the welfare of my generation. I know to-night, John, that as I failed in my Ministry of Preaching I have, so far, failed in my Ministry of Business. I don't mean that I have failed in *business*," he added with an odd smile, "I mean that I have failed to make my business a ministry; I have failed to accomplish in any large way the purpose of all Christian business, as I understand it."

Again, for a few silent moments, Big Dan seemed to be arranging his thoughts. When he spoke this time it was with the solemn earnestness of one laying bare the deepest convictions of his soul. "I tell you, John Saxton, if the business men of America do not somehow get a little Christian religion into the business of our country, and if the citizens of this nation do not get a little Christianity into their citizenship and into their everyday affairs, national destruction is inevitable. Since our survey of the political, economic and social conditions throughout the country was completed last month I have been making a careful study of the material gathered by our workers. The facts and figures submitted by these unprejudiced observers would convince any sane person that the United States of America is moving toward utter ruin. Unless this destructive trend of our national life is radically altered we will simply go to pieces. And the only force which can combat our present ruinous course is the religion of Jesus.

"Our survey shows that the annual cost of crime in the United States is over two and one half times the total

ordinary income of our nation and over three times the national budget.

“The number of prisoners in our penal institutions has increased in seventeen years from one hundred and six-tenths prisoners for every one hundred thousand of our population, to one hundred and fifty out of every one hundred thousand.

“In the last twenty-four years the crime of murder has increased from two and one-tenth per one hundred thousand to eight and five-tenths per one hundred thousand.

“Throughout the whole country the percentage of illegitimate births has steadily risen, while the number of very young mothers is rapidly increasing. The great majority of mothers of illegitimate children are under twenty-one years of age. In 1920 the age of greatest frequency was twenty years, but in 1924 it stood at eighteen, with an alarming number at the ages of seventeen and sixteen. Children, John! The generation that is just coming into the motherhood and fatherhood of the nation!

“Approximately half the convicts in our penitentiaries are under twenty-five, and eight out of ten are under thirty. It is estimated that eighty per cent of all crimes are committed by boys. Children, John, the generation that is just coming into the responsibilities of citizenship!

“With all this there is an astounding increase in degeneracy with all the horrors which that term, rightly understood, implies.”

Turning to his desk Big Dan took up a book. “This is Frederick Pierce’s *Mobilizing the Mid-Brain*. Listen to what he

says of certain conditions which are inseparable from our national situation as a whole:

“In about seventy years from now, that is to say, within the lifetime of some of us and within the lifetime of almost all our children, unless the rate of increase of insanity and disabling neurosis in America is radically checked, it will be intolerable for those who remain in health to support the burden of those who are mentally or nervously ill. To make sure that we do not allow ourselves to escape the force of this fact let us consider the utterances of two alienists within the last year, reporting from widely separated sections of the country. Their published statements agree on the following point—that at the present rate of increase in insanity in the United States and Canada, the last sane person will have disappeared from the major portion of North America in two hundred years from this date. In a third of that time the burden of taxation to maintain the necessary institutions and sanitariums would become tremendous. Moreover, the average breeding strain of our grandchildren will be so impaired and deteriorated that the normal expectation in every family of father, mother and three children, will be at least two wholly or partially disabled by mental or nervous disease.’

“In a footnote, he says:

“The figures are not taken merely from the period affected by the recent War, but go back through thirty years. For example, the six-year period of 1904-1910 shows increases, sectionally, of twenty-one per cent to forty per cent in enumerated hospital cases of insanity throughout the United States.’

“Dr. Pierce rightly adds: ‘The effect of this condition upon the chances of our nation being able to survive politically or economically, I leave to the reader’s imagination.’

“‘Read the figures as we may, there is no possible escape from their meaning. We have the choice of facing the issue and taking the necessary measures to correct the situation or of letting our children and grandchildren face it when it will probably be too late. Compared to the impending menace of this situation, such calamities as the recent War, with its welter of slaughter and aftermath of ruin, appear as mere ripples in the stream of human history.’

“Dr. Pierce makes no observation, here, John, as to the relation of morals to mental and nervous health. That there is a very close relationship I think no one of average intelligence will deny. Mental and nervous diseases are fruits of immorality, and immorality roots in irreligion. Only by re-establishing the people’s sense of God can our nation regain its moral, mental, and physical health and insure the future of the race.

“To show that I am neither an unbalanced pessimist nor a religious fanatic, and that I am not alone in my conclusions—do you remember the opening paragraph of that resolution which was passed by eight hundred business men at the luncheon of the Industrial Relations Committee of the Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce in 1922?

“‘As Americans, we recognize that we face a crucial condition in our social, political and industrial life, which, if not corrected, can lead only to individual and national disaster.’

“And Ernest T. Trigg in his address on that same occasion said:

“*There must be brought back into the situation a recognition of God and His divine guidance.*”

“These eight hundred leading industrialists of the country are not wild-eyed alarmists, John. Mr. Trigg is not a religious fanatic. These men represent the best business intelligence of this nation and this is their sane and solemn opinion as to the industrial situation and its needs.

“You know what the National Economic League is. It is not too much to say that a list of members of the National Council of the League would be practically a list of the biggest brains in America—every leading thinker in the country, almost—and they represent every field of our country’s interests: the Press, Law, Education, Government, Commerce, Labor. Well, the Council recently indicated the paramount problems of the United States by a preferential vote. The list of fifty-five subjects gives the comparative importance of these subjects as shown by the votes of eighteen thousand one hundred and seventy-six members of the Council. Now, if the votes had been equally distributed each subject would have received, in round numbers, three hundred and thirty votes. But, John, *three* subjects out of the fifty-five received *three thousand and seventy-seven* votes. These three problems are: Lawlessness, Respect for Law, Administration of Justice; Ethical, Moral and Religious Training. They are all embraced in one word RELIGION. Certainly no one would say that these eighteen thousand one hundred and seventy-six

members of the Council of the National Economic League are unbalanced pessimists or religious cranks.

“You and I understand why these leading thinkers of our country consider these three problems of such relatively great importance to the nation. The most feeble-minded man or woman in the land ought to be able to grasp the fact that without respect for law; without justice; without moral and religious training, our nation cannot endure.

“I have failed in my Ministry of Business, John, because I have failed to make any real contribution to our one great national need, the need of Christian religion.”

Big Dan was tremendously in earnest. As if half ashamed of his display of feeling he rose from his chair and turning away from his companion went again to the window where he stood looking down over the city which now lay under the full fury of the storm.

“I should think,” said Saxton slowly, “that you would be the last man in the world to feel that you had failed in your Ministry of Business. As your confidential agent I know, better than any person living, the enormous sums of money you have given to all sorts of charity—to schools and hospitals and every kind of benevolent work—and to individuals as well. Haven’t you, from the beginning, held the wealth of your mine as a trust to be administered by you?”

Big Dan answered with almost a touch of impatience:

“I have failed just the same.”

“But how have you failed, when your work has been a Christian work?”

“I have failed because the one great need of the world is not the need of Christian *work*. As I have just said, it is the need of Christian religion.

“Why, John, the amount of money given to good works—I mean outside of churches—to charity, to schools and education, is enormous. If you look up the statistics you will find that in the last few years there has been, in the United States, an amazing development of interest in social-welfare work and in charities and benevolences of every kind. But it is of profound significance that as the public interest in good works has increased the religious spirit of the people has declined. Never in the history of mankind has so much been given to what we call good works—works I mean that are essentially Christian. And never in our own country, at least, have the people been so irreligious. And this collapse of Christianity has brought us to the verge of an appalling moral bankruptcy.

“I know, John, that we give also something over seven hundred million dollars annually to religion; but wait, I have a letter—here it is. After mother’s death I found this among the things which she had treasured. It was written by the Old Shepherd, who was her only teacher, to his friend Dr. Coughlan. At the time of Dad Howitt’s death Dr. Coughlan gave this letter to mother. I have read it so many times that I know it by heart.

““We build temples and churches but will not worship in them; we hire spiritual advisers but refuse to heed them; we buy Bibles but will not read them; believing in God we do not fear Him; acknowledging Christ we neither follow nor obey Him.’”

As Big Dan was putting the Old Shepherd's letter reverently away in his desk, Saxton said: "But I thought you were such a firm believer in the religion of good works."

"And I am," returned Dan, quickly, "but I have come to understand that while good works are the fruits of the Christian religion, they are no more Christianity itself than a barrel of apples is a tree.

"Our fathers worshiped God. Christianity grew from that worship as a tree grows from its roots, until in our generation it is bearing its legitimate fruit—good works. Can any one question that the marvelous growth of interest in charities and social-welfare work of every kind in this generation is the direct result of the Christianity of our fathers? But while we to-day are harvesting these fruits of Christianity, like the miserable farmers of life that we are, we are neglecting the tree which produces them. With no thought of the future we are permitting the roots of our religion to die for want of intelligent cultivation.

"Our great need in this generation is to see our good works not as religion but as the fruit of religion—to understand that the fruit is not the tree—that the tree is Christianity, and the root of the tree is the worship of God as He is revealed in the life and teaching of Jesus, in the teaching of all other great spiritual leaders, in the wonders and beauty of nature and, indeed, in all the miracles of life and the universe. If this generation neglects to cultivate the tree there will be no fruit for the generations that are to come.

"Religiously, John, we are a race of spiritual grocerymen. We traffic in the produce upon which the very life of our

nation depends without a thought of the gardens and orchards which supply the stuff we buy and sell or a single care for the condition under which this food of the race is produced. To save America we must do more than deal in good works. To save America we must worship God.”

John Saxton said slowly, “I think I understand, but just what do you mean by the worship of God?”

“I mean the recognition of God—the feeling of God—the acknowledgment of God. The groceryman, for example, must feel God in the produce which he buys and sells. He must be conscious of God as he is conscious of money. He accepts money as a vital element in his business; he must accept God as a vital element in his life. He looks upon a grocery store as a necessity in the community; he must look upon religion as a necessity in the nation. The groceryman, in his business dealings, recognizes his dependence upon the farmer from whom he buys. He must go a step farther and habitually acknowledge to himself that without God manifested in nature there would be no food with which to feed the people—that without God the combined strength and skill of all the agriculturists of the world could not produce so much as a single grain of wheat. Our modern civilization does not recognize God—it only uses Him.”

“But do you mean to say that religious work—I do not mean distinctively church work, I mean any good work, Christian work—do you mean to say that such work is not a recognition of God, is not in fact worship?”

“It might be—it should be. If it were so conceived and so understood it would be. But only in exceptional cases is it so conceived, and certainly, by the people in general, it is not

so understood. These enormous sums of money that are given annually to charity and social-welfare work, and to schools and education—are these gifts ever thought of definitely as offerings to God—as acts of worship? Would any one contend that the purpose of these good works is to bring the people to a recognition of God? The millions devoted to scientific research, the millions bestowed upon higher educational institutions—is the idea or spirit of worship in these great endowments and foundations? As for our civic charity organizations and that class of good works, they are merely business policies and are so presented to the people. These vast fortunes that are given to good works are not even given in the name of Christianity, but in the names of individuals and cities and various organizations!

“But, John, listen, *the majority of the people who give these millions to humanity are Christians, and they are intelligent, thinking Christians.* They see the disaster which menaces our country. They know that the only thing that can save America is religion. Why, then, do they not give millions to religion? I’ll tell you why: It is because *in this so-called Christian country there is no organization in existence through which one can spend a dollar for a purely religious purpose.*”

“And that,” Big Dan continued, “is my problem.

“When father and mother turned Dewey Bald Mountain over to me they expected me, in their simple Christian way, to use it religiously. From the first I have honestly desired to fulfill the trust. I have talked it all out with Hope and with the boys. Neither Hope nor I have any wish to leave a great

fortune to the children. They have not been taught to expect it. She is with me heart and soul in what I propose to do. So are the boys. We haven't said anything to Grace yet because she is a little too young, and we don't like to disturb her just now with such questions. But the girl is too much like her mother, John, for us to have any doubts as to where she will stand.

"As I have told you, I am convinced that our country, because of its rapidly increasing wealth, together with the amazing growth of popular lawlessness, immorality, insane extravagance and cynical irreligion, is fast approaching a state of general anarchy, social degeneracy and political rottenness which can only result in our national downfall. I solemnly believe that the only thing which can save America is for us, somehow, to reestablish through worship the people's sense of God.

"They call me 'The Rockefeller of the lead and zinc industry—the Carnegie of mining,' and all that. You and I know, of course, that I am a long way yet from the Rockefeller-Carnegie class, but we know also that I am rated at several millions. John, I want to devote the millions I have taken from the Dewey Bald Mine to what I believe to be the one great vital need of the world to-day. I want, in a word, to give these millions to religion as other men have given millions to science and art and welfare-work and education. But, John, I don't know how to do it."

"You are a church man," said Saxton significantly. "It was as a church man that you—" he hesitated, "that you came into my life."

"Yes," said Big Dan.

Saxton continued: "During the fifteen years that I have known you, you have been an active member of the Old Commons Church, and you have given hundreds of thousands of dollars to the local work and to the missions and schools of your denomination. Don't you call that giving to religion?"

"I am a member of a church, John, and have contributed to its various denominational enterprises because it is the only organization I know which makes even a pretense of standing for and promoting the Christian religion. It is the only thing in sight. But we must face the fact that the Church of to-day is utterly unable to meet this national crisis of immorality and lawlessness which is the direct result of the irreligious spirit of the people.

"There must be a reason for this failure of the Church," he continued. "Are we to believe that Christianity is less potent for righteousness to-day than it was in the days of our fathers? Or has the Church been rendered impotent through the dissipations of its energies in meeting the demands of innumerable activities which are not purely Christian? One thing is clear: We must either doubt the power of the Christian religion as a vital force in the life of the people or we must question the policies and methods of the Church.

"You and I are Christians, John—members of the same church. Which shall we do? Question the divine religion of Jesus or question the human efficiency of this institution which exists for the sole purpose of making Christianity a vital factor in the lives of men?"

“There can be only one answer to that,” returned Saxton. “Between the teaching of Jesus and the wisdom of His human agents whose business it is to present Christianity to the world there can be no comparison.”

“Well, then,” said Big Dan, “suppose we, as business men, look into these human policies of the Church. It seems to me that the cause of this disastrous loss of efficiency is fairly obvious. I have realized for several years—as I believe the great majority of thinking church members realize—that a comparatively small portion of the enormous sum of money annually contributed to our churches is used for a purely religious purpose.

“The Bureau of the Census in 1916 lists one hundred and eighty-three different Christian denominations. Denominations are multiplied by dividing denominations into denominations. Think of it! One hundred and eighty-three separate and distinct Christian organizations to be maintained in the name of one Christ, for the sole purpose of teaching one Christianity!”

Saxton said thoughtfully: “I doubt if many people, to-day, believe that it makes any real difference as to which church one belongs.”

“Exactly,” returned Dan, “and that more than anything else perhaps proves the weakness of the denominational system. If the churches had not lost their grip upon their own members, even, it would make a tremendous difference as to which church one belonged. You are right, John, in the minds of the people it makes no difference. And, yet, the fact remains that it is impossible to give a dollar to any church and not support this denominationalism.

“The strength, energy and interest of the people, in these modern times, is most adequately represented in terms of money. Dollars stand for human power. Well, four-fifths, at least, of all the money contributed to the cause of Christian religion goes to maintain these denominational differences which we are told are of no importance. When, led by the religious desire of his heart to see the truths of Jesus’ teaching made effective among men, a church member gives five dollars to his church, what happens? Four dollars out of that five are spent to maintain whatever it is that makes his denomination different from the one hundred and eighty-two other denominations, each of which is actively engaged in spending four out of every five dollars which it receives to maintain *its* distinguishing features. And yet we are asked to believe that these one hundred and eighty-three churches are all one in Christ and are all united in preaching one Christianity. Mathematically, the oneness of the churches is one to four in that they spend one dollar for the thing upon which they agree and four dollars for the things upon which they differ.

“Does such a state of affairs, in fact, make no difference to the people, John? Is it any wonder that the central idea of Christianity is lost—that the spirit of worship is lost—that religion has become a subject for our humorous magazines, our jokesmiths, cartoonists and funny papers? The wonder is that any one retains membership in a church. No one would, except, as I say, they want to do *something* and the Church is the only thing they know.”

“But is there not a strong tendency among certain denominations to unite?” Saxton asked.

Big Dan answered: "In the years between 1906 and 1916—the last available figures—nine denominations consolidated with other bodies. In the same period twenty-two new denominations came into existence. It is true that there is something like an agreement between a few of the denominations as to a division of territory. In many communities churches have so multiplied that there are actually not enough people to maintain them all. But this agreement on the division of such territories is not primarily in the interest of Christianity; it is clearly an effort of the denominations to save themselves. Competition has simply reached a point where it is disastrous to all so they are uniting to maintain their differences."

Saxton smiled. "And yet you say the world has never before known such good works and that these good works are the fruits of the Christianity of our fathers. Well, our fathers worshiped God in denominational churches."

"Yes," replied Big Dan, "but the denominationalism of our fathers was born of their religious spirit. To-day, denominationalism is not the expression of a Christian spirit, but quite the contrary. To our fathers, the choice of a church was wholly a matter of religious conviction. To-day one joins this, that or the other church as one chooses a social club or a political order—the motive governing the choice is convenience, social, political or business policy, friendship or family. In our fathers' time a Christian character was necessary to membership in any church. To-day, under the competitive system of denominational churches, character is no longer a test of fellowship. If it were, the churches could not pay their running expenses. Denominationalism in

the past stood in the minds of the people for Christianity. Today the people think of Christianity—when they think of it at all—as something apart from denominationalism; and this is just as true of church members as it is of those who are not identified with any church.”

Big Dan arose suddenly and went again to the window where he stood silently looking out into the night and the storm. For some time he stood there as if lost in contemplation of the scene. Then, still looking down upon the city, he spoke: “John, how many churches have we here in Kansas City?”

“You mean denominations?”

“Yes.”

“I suppose we have most of them—there must be at least a hundred.”

“They all say that Christ is coming again, do they not?”

“Practically all teach the coming of Christ, yes.”

“Well, John, if Jesus had actually come in those clouds tonight, to which church would He call His followers? From which pulpit would He issue His divine proclamations? In the light of what you know of churches, would that particular church selected by Jesus rejoice that the Lord had come again to the world or would they not rather more rejoice that He had come to them and not to one of their rival denominations? In the rejoicing of the other ninety-nine would there be any note of regret that they must go to a rival denomination to meet their Lord? Would it be inconsistent with modern church methods if the pastor of the honored church were to rush to the newspapers with an announcement to the effect that his peculiar