

MEN DO GO TO CHURCH—one out of every nine, it seems; and it may interest the other eight to know that the one who does go to church gets something out of the formal act of worship, even if it is only the avoidance of a family fight. The figures may not hold generally; they were obtained only on a small scale by the Rev. Charles Stafford Brown, a Congregational minister at Longmont, Colorado. Research is usually occupied with discovering reasons why people don't go to church, but Mr. Brown tackled the problem from a new angle. Enlisting the help of half a dozen ministerial friends in other towns and as many of his ministerial friends in his own town as he could get to help him, he sent out blanks suggesting various groups of reasons for attending church, and leaving space for the men to write in other reasons not suggested. There was also space in which the men were asked to state which of the reasons was most important, and why. Mr. Brown received 320 replies; and he informs us in *The Christian Century* (Undenominational) that the first group of suggested reasons had to do with one's family, thus:

Why One Man Out of Nine Goes to Church

"Most of the men said that one big reason why they go to church is that they want their children to go, and it is easier to take them than to send them. A smaller number stated that they and their families have always gone to church, and they have simply kept up the habit, evidently a matter of family tradition and family pride. A still smaller number stated baldly that they go to church because their wives desire it; two went to the trouble of amplifying their declaration by adding that they go to church to avoid a weekly fight. Nearly a third of them added other reasons of their own, generally of little significance. One man goes because there isn't any other member of the family who can drive the car. Another goes because he promised his dying mother he would do so. These and other replies were not especially significant. When I asked these men to indicate which of the 'family' reasons seemed to them to be most compelling and important, more than two-thirds of them (247) indicated that they considered it a vital matter to set a good example to their children by going with them to church."

Here, observes Mr. Brown, is first-hand evidence on the matter of "the crumbling American home, not to imply anything as to the crumbling of the American Church," and he wonders if a careful survey of their families by the eight men who do not go to church "would not reveal the fact that they have less family solidarity, less respect for parental authority and example, than the families of the men who attend church and take their families with them. I am beginning to suspect," he says, "that the Church has a right to appeal to the eight on the ground that churchgoing is a positive force making for family unity and family loyalty and parental authority of the highest order."

Many of those who replied think that it is good business to attend church; nearly a third (106) feel that the Church is trying to establish a set of standards considerably higher than those now in vogue. Mr. Brown wonders if the eight men who do not go to church do not want the Kingdom of God in their business, or if the Church has failed to help them. "I am beginning to think," he says, "that the more I and my church clarify our opinions on matters of business and politics and social organization generally, the more we will attract and hold the great body of men who are at present outside the Church." Mr. Brown feels also that "if we muzzle the courageous voices which are raised against social and economic and political wrongs, and confine ourselves to preaching that which its advocates label the 'simple gospel, we may gain the influence and support of a few very powerful men with a stake in the existing order of injustice, but we shall lose a growing group of business men whose hands are reaching out after something better than dividends."

The one outstanding reason why they attend church, given by 317 out of the 320 men, was that they get a sense of the presence of God. "It is what we call worship," comments Mr. Brown. "They get it in the music and the prayers and the hymns; they even get it in the sermon, sometimes. It takes the form of a

sense of release from worry and bewilderment; it comes as an atmosphere of beauty and dignity; it even appears as a sense of the forgiveness of sin. What a thing to admit in this day and age! But they admit it!" So Mr. Brown wonders again about the eight men who do not go to church:

"Does not the sense of the presence of God attract them? Or do they not find that sense? Is there, perhaps, something in their character or habits or general make-up which prevents them from recognizing the presence of God as these other men do? I am beginning to think that I have a right to say to the men outside the Church that the evidence is against them, after all. They may not have found any reward in church; but men do, continually, find

spiritual reality there, and carry it away with them. What they find they use daily. They come back again and again, successfully, to have their experience replenished. One man finds spiritual reality in church; eight men do not. But that one man proves the point: spiritual reality can be found in church. Maybe the eight do not want it."

THE LITERARY DIGEST

August 31, 1929

p. 24