

Hitting

Era of Evangelistic Preaching has been Instituted in the First Congregational Church

Up the Brussels Carpet Trail to Salvation



ON the first Sabbath after "Billy" Sunday left Omaha the First Congregational church, of which Rev. Dr. Frederick T. Rouse has been pastor for eight years, was surprised to hear and see a most decided change in the pulpit and pastoral attitude of its pastor.

Meekness had given way to militancy. The pastor stood right up in the pulpit and called a spade as he had never done before. He told them their faults in vigorous terms. He laid down the law to them. He said: "My name has been Rouse. Henceforth it shall be von Hindenburg."

Has the mantle of "Billy" Sunday so far as Omaha is concerned fallen upon the shoulders of Dr. Rouse?

He says: "I have been too soft on my people and on myself. I will lay down the law more. People want to be told what's what."

If people want "Billy" Sunday gestures, aphorisms and lurid language, Dr. Rouse will preach to them that way.

Dr. Rouse made things hum right from the start. He renamed his bi-weekly church paper, changing it from "The Welcome" to "The New Welcome," and starting all over again at Vol. 1, No. 1. In that first issue he said:

"There is going to be new life in the First Congregational church. A new church, new people, new Sunday school, a new minister, a new light, a new love, a new joy and a New Welcome."

This issue contained announcement of evangelistic services every Sunday evening. "We want to open the trail to the foot of the cross. We want a large chorus choir of all those who have been in the tabernacle choir from our church and others who will help sing the gospel songs."

Who is this man, Rouse?

Not an original "Billy" Sunday man. Five years ago he voted against having the evangelist come to Omaha. Later when it was decided to have Sunday come, Dr. Rouse was urged to be chairman of the executive committee, which he declined. He was, however, an active member of the committee and worked throughout the campaign, and here is what he thinks of "Billy" now:

"I have been in the Chapman meetings, the Torrey meetings, the Moody meetings and with Cypsy Smith and B. Fay Mills. I believe that Sunday surpasses them all and is the greatest evangelist since Finney."

Though staid members of this old church have been startled by their pastor's new and up-to-the-minute methods, these methods have already brought results. The people are working as they never worked before. Young men are distributing circulars, advertising the church and meetings throughout the neighborhood. A score of women are organized to call on all within the church's territory who signed "Congregational" cards during the church census. They have divided the surrounding territory into districts and are making a house-to-house canvass, also.

What is this Omaha "Billy" Sunday's status theologically?

He is separated from "Billy" as far as the poles.

"Billy" is the most orthodox of the orthodox. Rouse is a liberal of the liberals. "Billy" accepts every word of the scriptures as

absolutely, unequivocally true and the inspired word of God.

Rouse is very far from that.

"I suppose that theologically I am further removed from the 'Billy' Sunday teachings than any of the pastors in the co-operating churches," he says. "His theory of atonement, of inspiration, of creation, is very far removed from mine. He calls me a 'lastard evolutionist.' I accept the noun, but not the adjective. It is more important for a man to get warmed by the fire than to hold the proper theory of combustion. My father had the 'logiston theory' of combustion. I hold the modern chemical theory. But he kept warmer than I because he kept nearer the flame of devotion."

This is rank heresy, according to "Billy" Sunday's preaching. The very idea of looking at the atonement in theory! Or at the inspiration of the Bible!

What the Rev. Dr. "Billy" Sunday would call the Rev. Dr. Rouse is not a matter of theory. No, no. That is a matter of absolute certainty.

Dr. Rouse doesn't believe the Bible story of the creation in six days. He says he is too deep a philosopher and scientist to believe that.

"The people in those days simply didn't know," he says. "Why, they speak of God creating the stars after the earth. They thought the earth was the center of the universe and explained it as best they could. Geology teaches us the countless ages required to form the earth. Yes, I am certainly an evolutionist."

What would "Billy" Sunday say of Dr. Rouse on this count? A child could answer. If it knew enough adjectives.

"Billy" Sunday was intolerant of any belief but his as he interpreted the word of God. Dr. Rouse is not only tolerant, but friendly toward all beliefs.

"If I have one hobby," he said, "it is to be the pastor of a large-minded, tolerant church. I try to hold the irenic spirit toward every form of religious faith. As founder of the church federation and for three years member of the executive committee of the Sunday campaign, my brethren will bear me witness that I have always stood for the larger heart and the extended hand. I think Mr. Sunday was wrong in his animus toward Christian Science and the people who 'button their collars in the back.' I was pleased at the tolerance toward the Jew and the Catholic."

"Billy" Sunday would have to use up all the adjectives he had left in another fusillade against his staunch supporter for this "heresy."

The First Congregational church was set against the Sunday movement at first. "They were afraid of 'Billy's' slang and coarseness and believed he was a grafter," says Dr. Rouse. "I was convinced he was an honest man and delivered the goods. I took a strong stand in his favor. Out of the very heart of my congregation fifty of my faithful members went up the sawdust trail. The minister and his wife were glad to be among them. The first night the trail was open I motored to one of the strong men of my congregation

Dr. Rouse's Ideal Church

"I would like to have a church whose doors were open equally to high and low, to rich and poor, to advanced and conservative. There ought to be room for those who like the highly estheticized service and those who want the saw-dust trail. There ought to be room for shouting Methodists and high-church Episcopalians. There ought to be room for shouting Methodists and high-church Episcopalians. There ought to be room for one who leans toward new thought and one who believes in miraculous healing. Imitate the virtues, emphasize likenesses, co-operate wherever possible and minimize differences. When the disciples wanted Christ to call down some people who were not following their trail He said, 'Forbid them not; no one can work in My name and lightly speak evil of Me.'

"One funny thing happened. It is well known that my good brother, Mackay, did not favor the Sunday meetings. Well, one of the brothers-in-law of our church got warmed up a little, not warm enough to come into our church, but just about warm enough to get into Brother Mackay's church. And now he is going to take one of our good families away from us to join Brother Mackay.

"On the other hand one good family with whom I have been laboring for eight years got so warmed up that our church wasn't warm enough for them and they are going to pull out and join a red-hot Methodist church. So there you are."

who had never confessed Christ and said, 'I would be proud to go up the trail with you.' He said, 'Would you? Well, I'll go.' From that time I had sawdust on my shoes."

As a member of the national council which met in New Haven late in October Dr. Rouse had the pleasure of defending the orthodox evangelist, "Billy" Sunday against the attacks of the retiring moderator of the council, Charles R. Brown, dean of Yale Theological seminary, and of seeing Ex-Mayor Beardsley of Kansas City, an ardent follower of Sunday, elected moderator.

"I have changed my methods of preaching since the coming of 'Billy' Sunday," said Dr. Rouse. "I am going to lay more emphasis on redemption and less on the philosophy of religion."

"Some people have asked me if I am going to imitate 'Billy' Sunday in his manners. I say, 'Yes,

I am going to imitate him exactly.' 'How is that?' they say. I say, 'He is exactly himself, and I am going to be exactly myself. He preaches the gospel according to 'Billy' Sunday; I am going to preach the gospel according to F. T. Rouse.' I have not changed my theories, but I have changed my emphasis. I shall preach more of sin and righteousness and faith and love and less of philosophy, science and evolution."

Has the new preaching brought results? Fifty-eight were received into membership last Sunday and half that many are expected today.

Tonight the first of the people's evangelistic services will start with the throwing open of the "Brussels carpet trail." If, in the language of the orthodox "Billy" Sunday, "the devil has hunted his hole," the liberal Dr. Rouse proposes to "plug up the hole and keep him there."