

## Francis Henry Peters

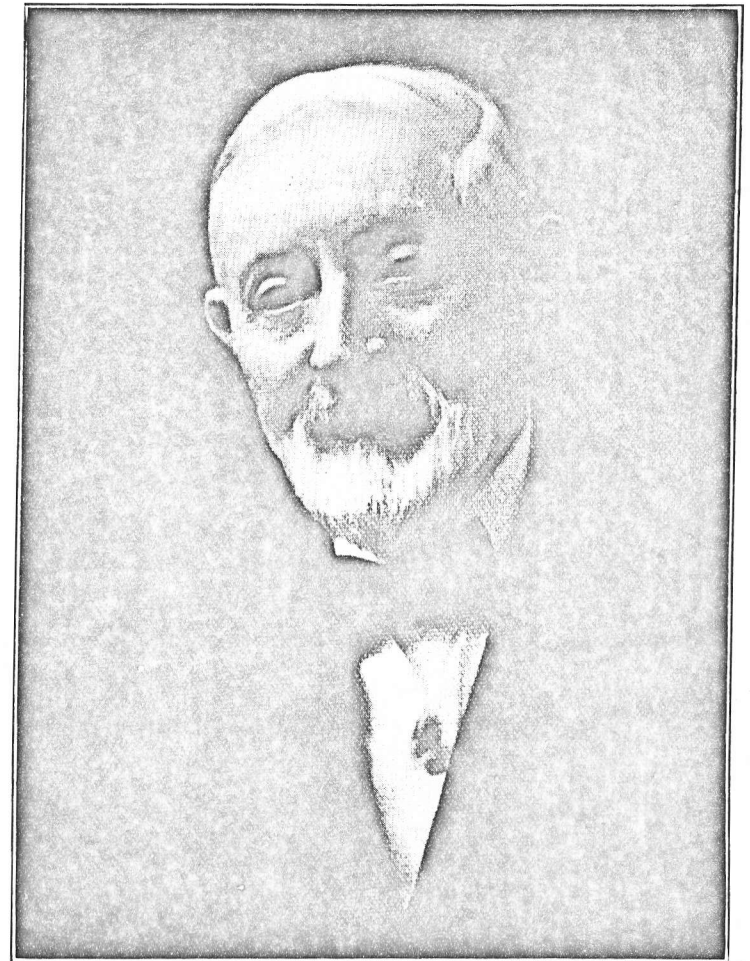
1838 - - 1924

Mr. Francis Henry Peters was one of the most outstanding Christian laymen of his generation. He was widely known and greatly beloved in St. Louis. He is remembered and will always be remembered as a man of unusual faith and broad Christian vision.

Mr. Peters was born on February 22, 1838, in Rothenfelde, Germany. He came to St. Louis on November 15, 1854. With his brother Frederick W. Peters he established a dry goods store in 1865 which was first known as the Peters and Brother Dry Goods Company and in 1887 was incorporated as the Peters Dry Goods and Clothing Company. In 1889, with his brother Frederick W. Peters and his nephew Henry W. Peters he founded the Peters and Miller Shoe Company which became in 1892 the Peters Shoe Company. In 1911 the Peters Shoe Company and the Roberts, Johnson and Rand Shoe Company consolidated and became the International Shoe Company. Mr. Peters was a very successful business executive and one with high ideals. He purposed always to conduct his business on a Christian basis.

On February 20, 1864, just nine months after the organization of our Church, which was then known as the First German Presbyterian Church, Mr. Peters united with our Church at the first Session meeting for the reception of members presided over by Dr. A. Vander Lippe. From that time to the day of his death, Mr. Peters was one of the most earnest and consecrated members of our Church. His benevolence, always done very humbly and unobtrusively, aided many Christian institutions and worthy causes. He entered into the life beyond this life on August 8, 1924. Our Church, which stands as a living memorial to Mr. and Mrs. Peters, has a great tradition to carry forward, a tradition given to it not only by this great Christian layman but also by the earnest souls who in the days that are passed were associated with him.

*A Service Commemorating*  
The One Hundredth Anniversary of the Birth  
of  
FRANCIS HENRY PETERS



**Peters Memorial Presbyterian Church**

*Sidney and Minnesota Avenues*

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*Saint Louis, Missouri*

Frederick A. Roblee, S.T.M.

*Sunday, February 20, 1938, at Ten Forty-Five O'clock*

"FRANCIS HENRY PETERS - A MAN OF FAITH AND VISION"

A Sermon by

The Rev. Frederick A. Roblee, S.T.M.

Pastor of the Peters Memorial Presbyterian Church  
of St. Louis, Missouri

This sermon was delivered at the special service commemorating the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Birth of Mr. Peters, held in the Church, Sunday morning, February 20, 1933.

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A Sermon by

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Text: "By faith he became a sojourner in the land of promise....for he looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God".

Hebrews 11:9, 10.

If we were to search the scriptures through and through for a text suitable for this service in which we are commemorating the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Mr. Peters, I do not think that we could find one more literally appropriate than these words spoken so long ago of Abraham. As that great pioneer of faith set out not knowing just where he was going and became a sojourner in the land of promise, so Mr. Peters by faith set out from his native country and became a sojourner in the new land of promise across the seas. And like Abraham of old, he too "looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God".

Francis Henry Peters was born on February 22, 1838 in Rothenfelde, Germany. He was the son of Gasper Henry and Louise Tepe Peters. He left his native land when he was only sixteen years of age and came to America where he joined a sister and brother in St. Louis. He arrived in this city on November 15, 1854 after a very stormy voyage made in a small sailing vessel from the north coast of Germany to New Orleans.

His first employment in St. Louis was as a clerk in the I. H. Blanke Candy Factory located on Market Street between Tenth and Eleventh Streets. A year or so later he became a clerk in a grocery store on North Broadway owned by a man named Robinson. In 1857, he became a clerk in his brother-in-law's store located in Bay, Missouri. In 1863 he returned to St. Louis and with his brother, Frederick, opened a

grocery store at Sixteenth and Market Streets. Two years later this business was disposed of at a profit and a dry goods store was established on the north-east corner of Fourteenth and Warren. At first this business was known as the Peters and Brother Dry Goods Company but was incorporated in 1887 as the Peters Dry Goods and Clothing Company.

In 1889 with his brother Frederick and a nephew Henry W. Peters, he founded the Peters and Miller Shoe Company with a factory on Thirteenth and Monroe Streets. The name was changed to the Peters Shoe Company in 1892 and was consolidated with the Roberts, Johnson and Rand Shoe Company in 1911 to form the International Shoe Company. From this brief outline of his remarkable business career it is easy to see that Mr. Peters was an executive of unusual resourcefulness. He was a builder and he built very well indeed.

On April 1, 1861 Mr. Peters married Henrietta Catherine Torwegge. She died not quite six years later on February 18, 1867 leaving two motherless children. On August 20, 1868, Mr. Peters married Eliza Knollenberg with whom he lived in blessed happiness the rest of his life. Mrs. Peters was a woman of remarkable faith and character. Together they made a wonderful couple. They trained their children well and bequeathed to them a wonderful inheritance of faith and vision. The many who knew the blessings and comforts of their home as well as the many more who met them in the wider circles of life, felt the inspiration of two really noble Christian people.

Mr. Peters joined our Church, which was then known as the First German Presbyterian Church just nine months after its organization. The date was February 20, 1864, and was the first Session meeting presided over by Dr. Van Der Lippe for the reception of members. From that time to the day of his death

Mr. Peters was one of the most earnest and consecrated members of our Church. Associated with him in the development of our Church were a number of earnest and resourceful men. There was Louis Schwarz who became an elder in the same year that Mr. Peters did, 1884. There were Fritz Zwicky, Albert Doerflinger, Adolph Gesellschaft, John Heideman and George W. Mehl to mention only a few. As we think of Mr. Peters' service to our Church I am sure that he would like to have us mention these and many others who labored with him in the Lord's vineyard.

Mr. Peters was eighty-six years of age when he entered into the life beyond this life on August 8, 1924. He was survived by his widow, seven children, fifteen grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. Some men are remembered because of the wealth and fame that they acquire; others are remembered and loved for what they themselves are. The latter is decidedly the case with Mr. Peters. Although it is true that he became very wealthy and gave very generously to many worthy institutions and causes, he was not primarily esteemed and beloved because of his philanthropy but rather because of the wholesome Christian spirit and purpose of his life. One who knew him intimately has written, "One brief visit in Mr. Peters' presence was enough to convince any caller that this man throughout his life had remained unspoiled by riches and that his friendship was the greatest gift he could bestow".

Perhaps the best description of Mr. Peters is given when it is said that he was a man of simple vital faith and broad Christian vision. He was a man of faith. A passage from his diary which he kept faithfully as part of his book of accounts until advancing age interfered, tells of the profound religious experience that was his very soon after he came to St. Louis. Listen to Mr. Peters' own words:

"When about eighteen years old, I worked at my trade as a candy maker in a factory on Market Street.

Among my fellow workmen was one whose name was Albert Hausman. This man was different from the other men. He was a very good worker and acted friendly to every one in the factory, but would not take part in anything unbecoming to a Christian or a gentleman. I soon got to love this man and tried to live such a life as Hausman did. I noticed that he had something I failed to have. Having been reared by Godly parents, the good Lord kept me from going astray altogether. My parents' prayers followed me wherever I went. I often felt this. I attended Church regularly, but knew I was not right with God. My friend invited me one day to a revival meeting, which was held in a Methodist Church, which he attended. God soon showed me, through His great mercy, that I was a sinner and that I needed a Saviour but I could find no peace, and kept on praying. So one night I made up my mind to keep on praying until the Lord would take the heavy burden of sin from me. After leaving the Church my good friend and I entered the candy factory and went into a small closet, used for drying, for prayer. In this closet the Lord took my burden from me, and I came to know that Christ had died for my sins also and reconciled me with the Father. I felt then very happy and thought I must tell everybody the Great Thing the Lord had done for me. I wrote my parents a letter and told them of my conversion. I also wrote an old Christian friend. This man had more experience than I had. He must have seen from my letter that I was self-confident and had the idea that I was all right now. The answer I received was very short. He wrote me, "Frank, the devil is still alive and not dead". I did not understand what he meant but I found later that he was right in telling me that the devil was still alive.

"I have tried to live a Christian life for more than 50 years but have often found that I needed the Lord's help to lead me and keep me, to live a life pleasing to Him. I know that only the

Blood of Christ He spilt on Calvary's Cross can save me and bring me to Heaven."

Until we have read that, we do not see Mr. Peters in true perspective at all. Having read that, everything else that we know about him takes on a richer and more wonderful meaning. Mr. Peters was a man who had become profoundly aware of the presence and the guidance of God in his life. It was this that gave him fortitude in sorrow, unyielding firmness in the face of temptation and untiring faithfulness in Christian service. Mr. Peters was a tither, but that was the minimum not the maximum standard which he set for his stewardship before God. And it was an account which he kept with the Lord, and no one else! Mr. Peters was amazingly humble and unobtrusive in his benevolence. Because of his life-long habit of making his gifts with the statement, "from a friend", much of what he gave remains to this day a closed book. He gave and he gave very, very generously with never a thought of any material profits or rewards returning to him from his gifts. Nor was this all. Mr. Peters was not only an extremely conscientious man in the stewardship of his money but also in the making of it. When he opened his dry goods store, he declared that he purposed to conduct it upon a Christian basis. From this purpose he never retreated, but always tried to conduct his business affairs as a Christian should.

Mr. Peters was not only a man of faith and deep and abiding convictions, he was also a man of vision. He invested his money in Christian institutions and worthy causes that would really count in the advancement of the Kingdom of God. It was largely through his gifts and earnest personal encouragement that the Winnebago Presbyterian Church began in 1897 as a mission of the old First German Presbyterian Church. Again it was largely through



his gifts and efforts that the Victor Street Mission was begun in 1903. Again in 1916 when the congregation moved out from Tenth and Rutger to this present location and became the Sidney Street Presbyterian Church, the faith, the vision and the material gifts of Mr. Peters were a great help in building and developing the new Church. It was at that time also that the Tenth Street Mission was organized to carry on in the old Church building. How proud and happy we are and ought to be of the name of our Church, which stands as a memorial to such a man as this!

Mr. Peters' personal interest was not confined just to his own Church. For many years he himself was Superintendent of the Sturgeon Market Sunday School. He was officially connected with the Young Men's Christian Association for more than forty years and he was one of the organizers and charter members of the North Side Branch. He was one of the founders of the Sunday School Union and helped to start many of the Sunday Schools in the Ozark Mountains. He was greatly interested in the University of Dubuque and made many gifts to that fine school. "Peters Commons", one of the most beautiful buildings on that campus, stands as a memorial to his interest and benevolence. In addition to these Mr. Peters was interested in a large number of other institutions and worthy causes. In all his philanthropy he was the same humble and earnest Christian steward. We are given a vivid and also a beautiful picture of both Mr. and Mrs. Peters in the words of Dr. Cornelius M. Steffens who was for many years the President of the University of Dubuque, in this paragraph from a book he wrote in 1921. Dr. Steffen says:

"Both Mr. and Mrs. Peters have given freely of their lives to the benefit of the University. These faithful friends feel most devoutly the blessings God has bestowed upon them; their faith and

gratitude are touchingly simple. Perhaps no living friends deserve greater honor for the growth of our work. Mr. Peters has guided the President like a father".

Such a tribute as this has been paid to few, but it was paid to Mr. Peters not by one, but by many who knew and loved him.

Thus we set before our minds and hearts this day the life of Francis Henry Peters. Very obviously anything we might say could neither add to nor take from the real character of such a man. He has gone to his heavenly reward, but WE remain to carry on the great tradition which he has left to us. My address this morning is not primarily a eulogy; it is a sermon. I am sure that Mr. Peters would desire that it should be such. And so, before we close we must ask these questions: Is such faith and vision needed today? Can there be such faith and vision in our lives now?

Of course, you will expect me to say "yes" to these questions,-- and that is exactly what I do say. But some of you will take that answer, at first, with reservations. "Men cannot live today, as Mr. Peters lived!", you will say. "Business cannot be conducted like that now! Moreover, the age of our fathers and our forefathers was not so perfect. Many of the weeds that so infest the soil of the post-war world were seeds planted or at least not removed from the soil in those days. Today, for many of us", some of you will say, "faith and vision are cancelled by cynicism and bitter, but after all, honest disillusionment".

Is there any answer to this modern mood, compounded as it is of frustration and disappointment, on the one hand, and a kind of dogged realism, on the other? Yes, the answer is simply the truth that we live today in a world being shaken to its foundations. What is false is being shown to be false. All that is false is battering itself to pieces in a world which,

in its ultimate foundations, is moral. What is true is being shown to be true and is being established more firmly than ever. Of course, this process has always been going on but we live in a time when the judgments of the Eternal are written large. There is much terrible suffering, yes! But suppose it were not so? Suppose hate and selfishness did not make any difference? Suppose men could exploit their fellow-men without wrecking and destroying the economic and social order in which they did it,--what then? You see our real hope is just in the tremendous and incontrovertible fact that this IS God's world -- a moral world -- and that as men sow, so do they reap!

Some things are being shaken today and ought to be shaken, until they stand revealed in all their terrible ugliness and futility. Such a thing is self-righteousness; national self-righteousness in foreign policy, group self-righteousness in industrial and racial exploitation, and individual self-righteousness in our dealings with one another. Another such thing that is being shaken and ought to be shaken is secular materialism; the whole terrible lie that we can live successfully in this world as if it were not God's world at all, -- as if material things were all that mattered to spiritual beings. A third such thing that is being shaken and ought to be shaken is selfishness. There is much selfishness and there is far too little real happiness and satisfaction. Never in all history was it written plainer than it is being written today that the only way in which we can be happy is to live in ways which help others to find happiness also.

The more such things as self-righteousness, secular materialism, and selfishness are shaken the more other things stand out clearly revealed and eternal. One of these is the faith in God and the transcendent value of every human being. Another is faith in the marvelous saving power and grace of the

Lord Jesus. Still another is the vision of the "city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God"; the city that God Himself is building with the personalities of the men and women who live sincerely and dare greatly for Christ and His Kingdom.

The secret of really successful living in this moral universe is to release the better alternative again and again in our own lives and in the ever widening circle of our own influence. Always, in every situation, there is before us a best possible alternative and also something short of that best. The best possible alternative must be chosen and released again and again. This can only be done as we cultivate a life of simple sincere faith and earnest daring Christian purpose, as did Mr. Peters; as we live our lives under divine grace and guidance, as he did. The eternal foundations have not changed. Upon them, we too must build.

(Note:- For information concerning the life of Mr. Peters, I am greatly indebted to "Francis Henry Peters -- A Tribute" written in 1926 by Dr. Karl F. Wettstone, to a book entitled "Adventures in Money Raising" by C. M. Steffens and Paul P. Faris written in 1930, and to conversations with members of his family and others who knew this great Christian intimately. -- F. A. Roblee.)