

A SERMON

Delivered by the Reverend Frank Pitt
Last Sunday Morning, March 23rd
at Highland Park Presbyterian Church

The Simplicity of Christianity

"I fear, lest by any means . . . your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ."—2 Corinthians 11:3.

When St. Paul wrote that to the Church at Corinth he emphasized a truth of which we should never cease reminding ourselves, namely, that Christianity is a very simple faith and that when Christianity loses its simplicity it loses its force. How simple a thing, in its essence, is Christianity? Is there a more simple story in the world than the story of the Good Samaritan? The priest passed by. The Levite passed by. But the Samaritan had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. Is there anything more simple than that? That story was the reply which Jesus made to the lawyer who asked him saying, "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" The Master did not enter into a discussion with him. He did not lay down an abstract formula for achieving eternal life. He told him a story of matchless compassion. It was characteristic of the Master. One of the richest memories of Jesus is his simplicity.

And yet, on the other hand, how complex and puzzling Christianity has become! Suppose each one of us had to define Christianity, could we do it? If we could do it, how different the definitions would be! One man says, "Christianity? Why, that is the Christian Church." Another man says, "The Christian Church? That is not Christianity. I never set foot in a Church, but I count myself a Christian." One man says, "Christianity means a belief in the historic creeds of Christendom." Another man says, "Christianity means a belief in a life, not in a creed." So it goes, a battledore and shuttlecock of disagreement and confusion. And yet, despite this, men seem to be pretty well agreed that the world cannot get along without Christianity. We do not go as a rule to a newspaper editorial for inspiration regarding the worth of our faith; but this is what Henry Waterson wrote in the "Louisville Courier-Journal" during the Great War: "Surely the future looks black enough, yet it holds a hope, a single hope. One, and one power only, can arrest the descent and save us. That is the Christian religion. Democracy is but a side issue. The paramount issue underlying the issue of Democracy is the religion of Christ, and Him crucified; the bedrock of civilization; the source and resource of all that is worth having in the world that is, that gives promise in the world that is to come; not an abstract notion; not as a huddle of sects and factions; but as a mighty force and principle of being."

If the world is to be saved from destruction—it will be saved alone by the Christian religion. A great many people outside the Christian Church feel just the same way. Why is it that so many have a befuddled attitude towards that faith which they believe holds out such promises for the world? What has become of the simplicity that characterized the Master's message? Christianity has lost its simplicity because it has been "over-theologized." That is a coined word, but you all understand perfectly what it means. Arthur Christopher Benson, the English essayist, in one of his thought-provoking essays, laments that fact that the simple religion of Jesus, almost before it had started on its course, was covered over with the superficial wrappings of theology. Now none of us can afford to ignore a certain amount of theology. We hold fast to certain truths, but, if we think at all, we must have an intellectual peg of some kind on which to hang our view of life. I am not condemning theology; but what I am condemning is the bitter feeling and persecution which have often come because men have "theologized" too much. The Master had hardly ascended into heaven before men began to get involved in disputation and argument about sin and salvation. It was this fatal misunderstanding of Christianity that was responsible for the Inquisition. Even John Calvin allowed Servetus to be burned at the stake because he said, "Jesus, Son of the Eternal God," instead of "Jesus, Eternal Son of God." Today the Christian Church is badly hampered because men have "over-theologized" in the past. We sympathize with a character in one of H. G. Wells' novels who writes to a friend, "I nibble at religion. I am immensely attracted. I stand in the doorway. Only when they come out to persuade me to come in I am like a shy child and I go away. The temples beguile me and the music, but not the men. I feel I want to join it, and they say 'join us.' They are like vergers. Such small things! Such dreadful little ARGUING men! They don't let you come in, they want you to say they are right. . . . I wish I could pray with you. Stephen; I wish I could kneel down somewhere with you of all people and pray."

As an example of the way in which theology can wander off from the beaten track of life, let me read to you from "The Larger Catechism" the answer to the question, "Wherein do justification and sanctification differ?" Remember that this answer is one sentence. "Although sanctification be inseparably joined without justification, yet they differ, in that God in justification imputeth the righteousness of Christ; in sanctification His Spirit infuseth grace, and enableth to the exercise thereof; in the former, sin is pardoned; in the other, it is subdued; the one free all believers from the revenging wrath of God; and that perfectly in this life; that they never fall into condemnation; the other is neither equal in all, nor in this life perfect

in any, but growing up to perfection." It is pretty hard to understand that. It does not enliven the mind or the soul. No; a man may walk through the woods on a May morning and drink in the beauty of the flowers without opening a book on botany. A man may stand at night without opening a book on astronomy. We can live the simple religion of the Master without a knowledge of the theology by which He has been almost hidden from our sight.

Christianity has lost its simplicity because it has been "over-ritualized." When we think of ritual we think instinctively of the Roman Catholic Church, the Greek Orthodox Church, and the Episcopal Church. That is a mistake. We have our ritual, too, every Sunday morning. The constant ritual for us is to prevent this problem from becoming meaningless. Our Apostles' Creed may become a mere empty recital. Our responsive readings, psalms which grew up out of Israel's spiritual struggles, may have no message for us. Our hymns, songs sprung out of the victories and defeats of Christendom through the ages, may become mechanical upon our lips. We have our ritual, too, as well as the Episcopalians. We can never have enough of the right kind of ritual. The altar, the crucifix, the set form of service, the historic prayers, all have their proper place in the Christian's heart; but when they are worshipped in and of themselves, or when they become meaningless because of constant repetition, then our Christianity has been "over-ritualized."

Christianity has lost its simplicity because it has been "over-organized." Christianity has always had to face that problem in ever-increasing intensity, and the problem today is worse than it ever was before. The Master had no organization for the spread of His Gospel in the sense in which we understand that word. Of course, as Christianity developed and spread broadcast over the Roman Empire it had to have organization. But what about its organization in the Twentieth Century? What about its organization in the city of Highland Park? We have one Roman Catholic Church, one Episcopal Church, one Methodist Church, one Presbyterian Church, one United Evangelical Church, one Church of the Evangelical Association, one Evangelical Lutheran Church. We have eight Churches, each Church representing a different denomination. In addition we have a small band who meet weekly and who call themselves "The Believers." Each church means a different minister, a different Sunday school, and a good deal of overlapping of energy. This "over-organization" in Highland Park is bad enough, but it does not compare with the "over-organization" in most places. Carrying this out on the broader scale we find that it means overlapping in missionary boards, in church extension activities, and in everything connected with the spread of the Gospel of Christ. Imagine, if you can, the Red Cross split into fifty different units with separate machinery, trying to relieve Belgium and France.

The danger is that in making the machinery move we forget the more important thing that the machinery is supposed to aid. No one appreciates it more than the minister of such a church as this. Every week of his life he receives invitations to attend the meetings of this or that organization. Sometimes he is tempted with the promise of a banquet. Sometimes he is requested to make the address of the evening. He is asked to travel here and travel there in the interests of a certain cause. He could spend all his time attending conferences and examining train schedules and making out reports. The difficulty is to do the one thing needful, to drink of the springs of everlasting life, to hold communion with God amid the world's hurry and noise.

Because men have hidden Christ from our view with their volumes of theology, piled mountain-high, because men have made us forget Christ as we watch the smoke and incense of ritual, and because men have sometimes allowed the machinery of Christianity to shut out the fact of Christianity, it is good that we should ponder on the simplicity of Jesus and remember the warning given by Paul to the members of the Church at Corinth.

It is obvious that Christianity must be a very simple faith for it was intended for all sorts of people. It fits into every human need. Where is the largest Presbyterian Church in the world? It is not in Scotland, the home of Presbyterianism. It is not in the United States where Presbyterianism has taken its greatest strides. The Presbyterian Church with the largest membership is in Elaat, in Africa, a foreign mission station; and the membership is made up of black-colored men and women who were savages until the missionaries brought them the redemptive message of the Master a generation ago. The faith that kindles their ideals is the same faith that kindles our ideals. The faith that inspires the black folk of that church in Africa inspires also scholars and philosophers and social reformers. It inspires theological professors and statesmen and leaders of the new day of civilization. Their faith is the faith which we said was at stake when the guns sent the shells whistling across No Man's Land in the Great War. It must be a simple faith which transcends the distinction of class and color and race. It can be said now as it was in olden times, "the common people heard him gladly."

What is simplicity? There are many who think that simplicity is synonymous with crudeness. But simplicity does not mean crudeness. It is the absence of the excessive and the artificial. It is the freedom from artificiality. It is the concentration on the essentials. It is putting the emphasis on the things that matter. That is simplicity. It is said that John Bright was so simple, so clear, so direct in his political speeches that a crossing-sweeper could understand him. John Bright was a Quaker and his speeches were the expression of the simplicity of his personality. One of the greatest speakers in our country is Lyman Abbott. He was nearly eighty years old when he addressed a group of theological students of which I was fortunate enough to be a member. That address stands out in my memory far beyond any other address of my student days. Why? Because of its simplicity. It laid hold on the essential things and it pressed them home. "I am the Bread of Life. . . I am the Door. . . I am the Light of the World," said Jesus—every word monosyllabic.

Suppose we apply the test of simplicity to our faith! It casts a light on many problems. It helps to explain some of the things that have puzzled us. Do we have intellectual difficulties with Christianity? The difficulties do not come from the faith of Christ. They come from the complexities of theology. No one can go astray on the supreme words of the Master's message, "Hope," "Peace," "Rest," "Light," "Life," "Joy." Is there anything artificial in our Christianity? Then we have not achieved the simplicity of Jesus. Are we concentrating on the essentials? Are we putting the emphasis on the things that matter? Are we so busy doing the machinery that we forget the purpose behind it? The Christian Church today is heavily burdened with the things that do not matter. It needs the ministry of simplicity. Let us offer it our ministry. The priest passed by. The Levite passed by. But the Samaritan had compassion on him and took care of him. Let us remember the simplicity of Christ.

—Highland Park Presbyterian Church, March 23, 1919.

A Business Proposition

By WILL PAYNE.

Secretary Glass said the Victory Liberty Loan should appeal to the patriotism of the people of the United States and not be merely a business proposition.

Isn't that so? It was no business proposition that sent two million young Americans to France and made nearly two million more give up their time for more than a year to train for going. This Victory Loan is to pay for equipping them, sending them over, keeping them there and fetching them back. Will you look one of them in the face and say, "As soon as you stopped fighting and I had given you three hearty cheers you became just a business proposition?"

But the loan is a business proposition, too—this way:

You are Uncle Sam—a hundred odd million of you, individually. Says Uncle Sam to himself, "I owe several million dollars—owe it now on due and maturing obligations that must be met to the last cent. My credit is practically unlimited. I can borrow that money of the banks. They've got to lend it to me. That will mean a huge inflation of bank credit—bank loans all swollen up with my paper—banks consequently in a poorer condition to take care of the ordinary business of the country."

But if I do borrow the money of the banks I've got to pay them back some time. There are only two ways in which a man can finally get out of debt. One way is to sell some property and pay up; the other way is to earn more than he spends, saving the difference. I have no property to sell. Can't sell the White House or the national forests. The second way is the only way for me. "Shall I borrow the money from the banks now and thereby put off the real settlement, or shall a hundred million individual Uncle Sams right now save out of their incomes and lend the saving to the collective Uncle Sam, thereby enabling him to pay the bills and wipe the slate, with no inflation, leaving the banks in sound condition to meet the needs of ordinary business?"

That is the question. It is your debt. You owe the money. Finally you've got to pay it in some fashion. To lend in on the banks now is the most expensive way temporarily to dispose of it. To save, individually, is the best and cheapest way. Even waving patriotism, it comes down to a business proposition. Only the savings and subscriptions of the whole public can take care of the loan without inflation.

—HELP "FINISH THE JOB."
THE FUN OF SAVING MONEY.

The fun of saving money! Best fun in the world, once you get started. Great game, isn't it, where every player wins, always, and no one could possibly lose.

What's the fun consist of? What constitutes the fun of any good game? The planning, the struggle, the contest; the spirit of competition, emulation, excitement; the rush, the climax, the triumph of making goal.

What's the cost, the price of admission? Just the cost of any good game; time, energy, the letting go of nonessentials for the joy of realized ambition and success.

What's the reward? The game and its gaining. The bliss of fighting, climbing, fighting and climbing to win. What's the method? Begin and keep going. Make a start, set a goal and attain it. Start again and make the same goal in shorter period. Set a new and sterner goal and time limit and beat the record again.

Uncle Sam can't be beat as a partner, game-credits foot up before you know it, and it doesn't cost much to sit in.

And some think that prosperity can be acquired by tearing things up so that no one would be able to pay any taxes.

The FRANKLIN SEDAN

An Economical Car For All-Year Service

When the Franklin Company introduced the modern Sedan type in this country, it was apparent that it would become the logical all-year car.

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With its growing popularity, other automobile manufacturers have added this type to their lines, until there are now Sedans of almost every make.

But the economy of the Franklin Sedan is not easily copied. Years of experience, alone, have built into the Franklin Sedan, a steady day-by-day delivery of

18 to 20 miles to the gallon of gasoline—instead of the usual 8.

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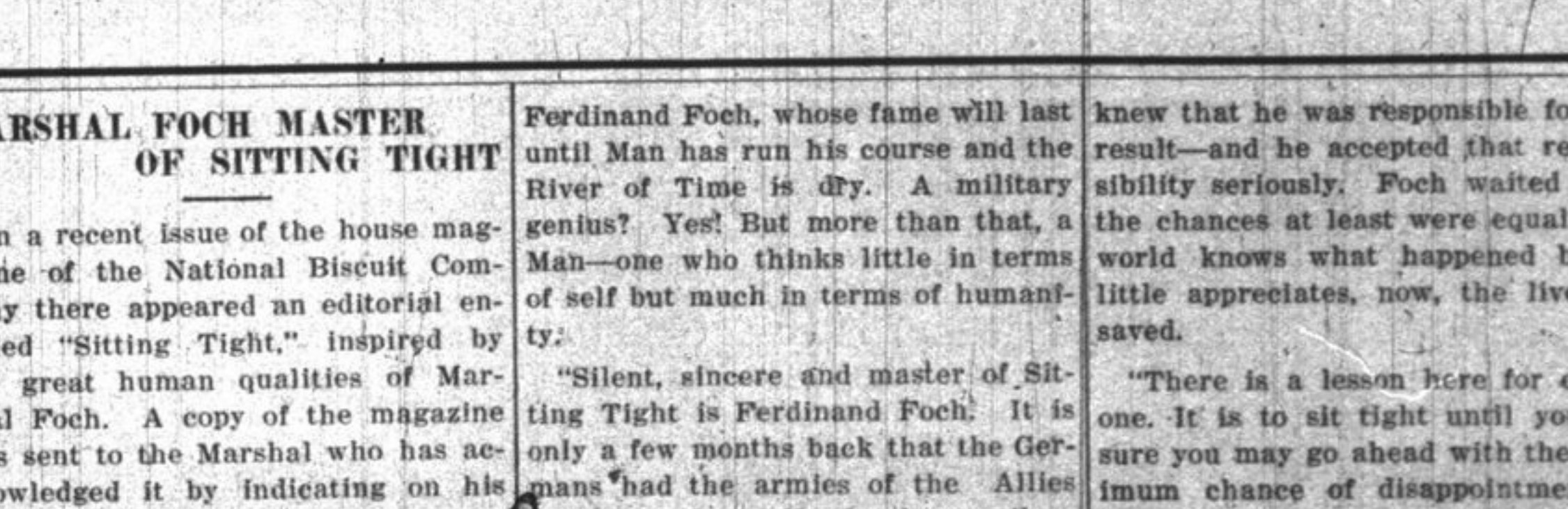
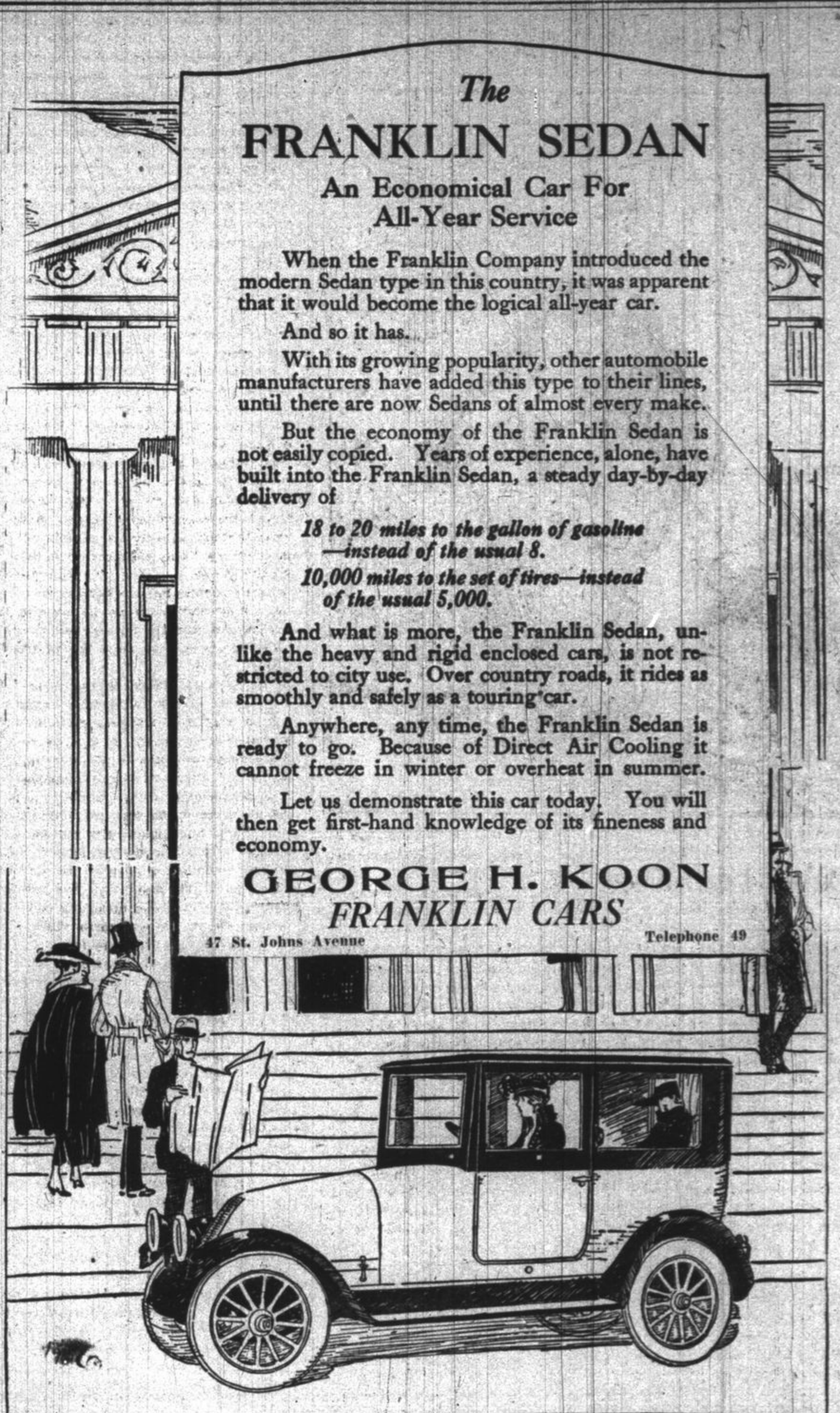
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MARSHAL FOCH MASTER OF SITTING TIGHT

In a recent issue of the house magazine of the National Biscuit Company there appeared an editorial entitled "Sitting Tight," inspired by the great human qualities of Marshal Foch. A copy of the magazine was sent to the Marshal who has acknowledged it by indicating on his personal card this message: "Sin cere remerciements," meaning "sincere thanks." Terse and to the point, as is the man. "The most unassuming great man I ever met," says Charles M. Schwab.

The editorial was as follows:

"The peace for which the free peoples of the earth have had to fight is won. Truth and Justice and Right have triumphed and eternally will triumph. There is a God!

"Large against the back ground of the war's end looms the figure of

Ferdinand Foch, whose fame will last until Man has run his course and the River of Time is dry. A military genius? Yes! But more than that, a Man—one who thinks little in terms of self but much in terms of humanity.

"Silent, sincere and master of Sitting Tight is Ferdinand Foch. It is only a few months back that the Germans had the armies of the Allies backed to the wall. In these evil days the whole world somewhat querulously asked: 'Where is Foch?'

"Foch has a heart as well as brains. He sat tight because he knew that thousands upon thousands of human lives depended upon his every decision. Men of this type do not take long chances—only fools and gamblers and German military leaders, to whom soldiers are cannon fodder, do that.

"Foch sat tight, letting the world pass such comment as it might. He

knew that he was responsible for the result—and he accepted that responsibility seriously. Foch waited until the chances at least were equal. The world knows what happened but it little appreciates, now, the lives he saved.

"There is a lesson here for everyone. It is to sit tight until you are sure you may go ahead with the minimum chance of disappointment or failure.

"Unless you have something worth while to offer when the subject is presented, sit tight. If you don't know what it is all about there is all the more reason you should sit tight, for in that way you will be learning something instead of displaying your ignorance. Sit tight, but say the right thing at the right time. Criticize when you can criticize constructively when you can suggest something better for the thing you tear down."