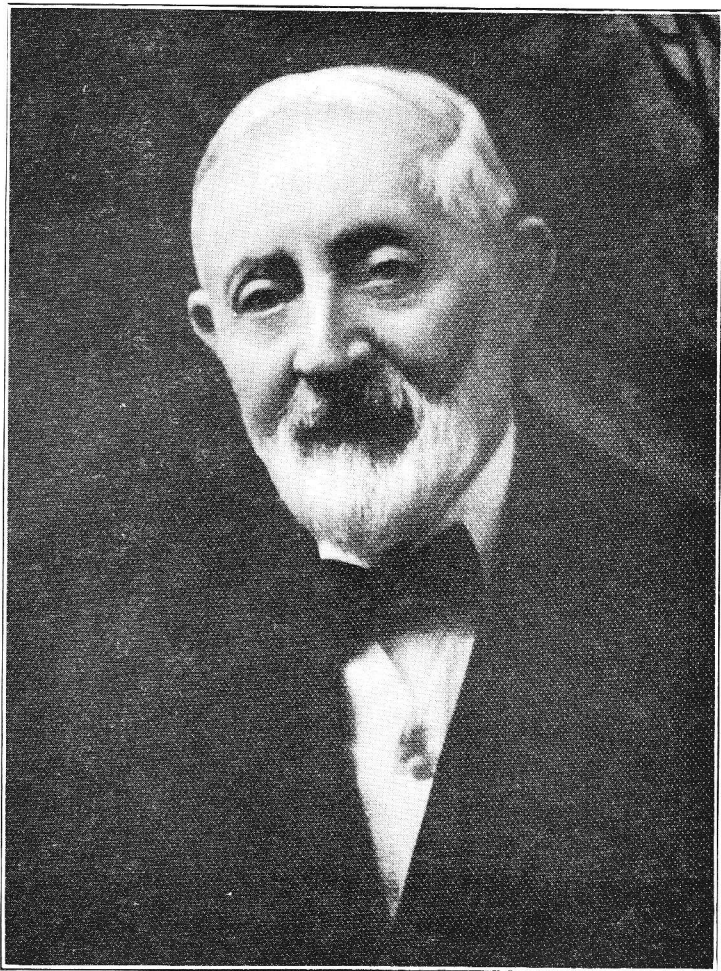


Francis Henry Peters

**Business Man
and
Philanthropist**

A Tribute

Written by
Rev. Karl Frederick Wettstone, D. D.
Former Pastor of Mr. Peters



FRANCIS HENRY PETERS
1838 — 1924

Within the last decade the Christian Church in America has witnessed the passing of a number of its noblest Christian laymen; men who rose from humble beginnings to positions of leadership in industry and business, and who through it all remained true to their Christian convictions and faithful to their sacred trusts; men who from the first moment of their slow and tedious upward climb until the final bugle call at the zenith of power, regarded themselves as debtors unto the Lord and not as so-called "self-made men"; men whose lives were a worthy example to their families, friends and employees and whose substance was at the disposal of God's call. Tithers they were, all of them, as a matter of principle, but the Lord's account was again and again cheerfully overdrawn. Their passing constitutes an irreparable loss. ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Such a man was Francis Henry Peters, of St. Louis, Missouri, co-founder of the Peters Shoe Company---now the International Shoe Company---and, until his retirement from active business, President of the Peters Dry Goods Company. ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Throughout the long years of his association with extensive business interests, this quiet and unassuming Christian layman demonstrated beyond a doubt the fact that a man engaged in business is capable of exemplifying the principles of Christianity. A clear-sighted executive and a business organizer, he built his dry goods and shoe concerns upon enduring foundations. "Years ago, when together with my brother, Frederick, I established a dry goods store in North St. Louis", he once told the writer, "I determined to conduct it upon a Christian basis. As soon as the near-by merchants discovered that I would, under no circumstances, keep open on Sunday, they came to me in a body and remonstrated, predicting quick and absolute failure if I did not do as they did. But I made it very clear to them that the Sabbath would be faithfully observed by the Peters Dry Goods Company, regardless of consequences. That was in 1865. Today, as I look over the ground, I find that not one of these merchants is still there, whereas our Company has grown

until now it covers half a city block and our old customers still trade with us, though they are scattered over the entire city of St. Louis. Does it pay to be a Christian?" And his eyes twinkled reassuringly as he asked this question of the writer. ~ ~ ~ ~

Some men are esteemed because of their wealth; others are loved for what they are. 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. ~ ~ ~ ~

In order to find the secret of this man's remarkable career, we turn to his diary, which he kept faithfully --- until advancing age interfered --- as a part of his book of accounts. We will let him tell his story in his own words:

"When about eighteen years old," Mr. Peters wrote, "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 I 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. I consented and went with him every evening. 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 I 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."

In the light of this beautiful inner experience one can more fully appreciate the secret of this man's fortitude in sorrow, firmness in temptation and faithfulness in Christian service. No mere methods of efficiency can produce such sterling qualities in a man, assure him of lasting success in business or make him a worthy example to his children and children's children.

Francis Henry Peters, a son of Caspar Henry and Louise (nee Tepe), and grandson of Caspar Henry and Marie Catherine (nee

Hassman), was born February 22, 1838, in Rothenfelde, Germany, where he attended the public schools. He left his home for St. Louis, where a sister and brother had already preceded him on August 28, 1854, arriving in St. Louis on November 15, of the same year, after a very stormy sea voyage in a small sail boat from the north coast of his native land to New Orleans, La. ~ ~ ~ ~

His first position was as clerk in a candy factory on Market Street between 10th and 11th Streets, St. Louis, owned by J. H. Blanke. Later he was a clerk in a grocery store on North Broadway owned by a man named Robinson. Removing to Bay, Missouri, March 20, 1857, he became a clerk in the store of his brother-in-law, after whose death he and his sister conducted the business together. ~ ~ ~ ~

February 17, 1863, he again located in St. Louis, and with his brother, Frederick, opened a grocery store at 16th and Market Streets. This business was disposed of at a profit and

on November 30, 1865, a dry goods store was established on the north-east corner of 14th and Jefferson, now Clinton Street. They moved into their new building at 2600 North 14th Street in the summer of 1881. This business is still carried on by two of his sons, on an ever growing scale. At first it was known as the Peters and Brother Dry Goods Company, but was incorporated in 1887 as the Peters Dry Goods and Clothing Company. Though retired from that business in later years, Mr. Peters frequently visited the Company's store. ~ ~

On January 6, 1889, with Frederick W. Peters, a brother, and Henry W. Peters, a nephew, he founded the Peters & Miller Shoe Company, with a capital of \$140,000, and with a factory on Thirteenth and Monroe Streets. January 1, 1892, the firm became the Peters Shoe Company, of which he was Vice President; in December, 1911, the Peters Shoe Company, and the Roberts, Johnson and Rand Shoe Company consoli-

dated and incorporated as the International Shoe Company, which is now one of the largest shoe manufacturing concerns in the United States. Two of Mr. Peters' sons, Frederick W. and Charles H., served as vice-presidents of the International Company. Mr. Peters was much interested in civic matters, but he at no time held public office.

On April 1, 1861, Mr. Peters married Henrietta Catherine Torwegge, who was born December 17, 1841, and died February 18, 1867. With two motherless children he married Eliza Knollenberg, on August 20, 1868, who, herself a sterling Christian character and a woman of remarkable Christian faith, was ever satisfied to live in the shadow of her husband's reflected glory. In the year 1923 Mr. and Mrs. Peters were privileged to celebrate their 55th Wedding Anniversary in good health among a happy and large circle of relatives and friends. ~

Mr. Peters became a member of the First German Presbyterian Church - - now the

Sidney Street Presbyterian Church of St. Louis - - shortly after its organization in 1862, and was particularly interested in its Sunday School work. He soon became a ruling Elder and remained such until the time of his death. ~ ~ ~ ~

As a member of said Church and one of its most enthusiastic workers, he helped organize and largely supported the Winnebago Presbyterian Mission, which long since has grown into a strong and healthy Church. He also started the Victor Street Presbyterian Mission in one of the most congested industrial districts of the city, which Mission to this day continues as a branch of the Sidney Street Church. ~ ~

When the time came for the congregation to seek a new location, again his generous contributions made possible the erection of the new Church and the purchase of a new Manse. Through his efforts, also, the old Church was continued as a mission. ~

Mr. Peters was for many years Superintendent of the Sturgeon Market Sunday School. He was officially connected with the Young Men's Christian Association for over 40 years and was one of the organizers and charter members of the North Side Branch. He was one of the founders of the Sunday School Union. Through his contributions Sunday Schools in the Ozark Mountains and at other needy places were organized.

His love for the University of Dubuque, of Dubuque, Iowa, a Presbyterian Institution for the training of Christian Ministers and Leaders for the Foreign Speaking Communities in America, was genuine and constant. Time and again he gave of his substance for the promotion of this special work, and it has been conservatively estimated that over a period of some twenty years said University was the recipient of gifts from him amounting to more than \$350,000.00. He gave towards current expenses, buildings and endowment. One of the buildings on the

campus has been dedicated to his memory and is known as "Peters Commons." This building contains a large dining room, an up-to-date kitchen, a home economics room and an office on the main floor; a bakery, store rooms and a first-class laundry in the basement; the University's Department of Music, and the quarters of the Matron with those of her assistants upstairs, all of which was made possible through the generous gift of Mr. Peters.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

He was also deeply interested in and was a large contributor to the Presbyterian Boards of Home and Foreign Missions, Presbyterian Board for Aged and Disabled Ministers, the German Protestant Orphans Home, St. Louis, the St. Louis Altenheim, the St. Louis Colored Orphans Home, the Presbyterian Orphanage at Farmington, Missouri, the Childrens' Home Society of Missouri, the Epileptic Home, the Tuberculosis Society, and many other worthy causes. It is estimated that he gave away close to

\$1,000,000.00 during his life time, besides leaving numerous bequests to charity in his last will. ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

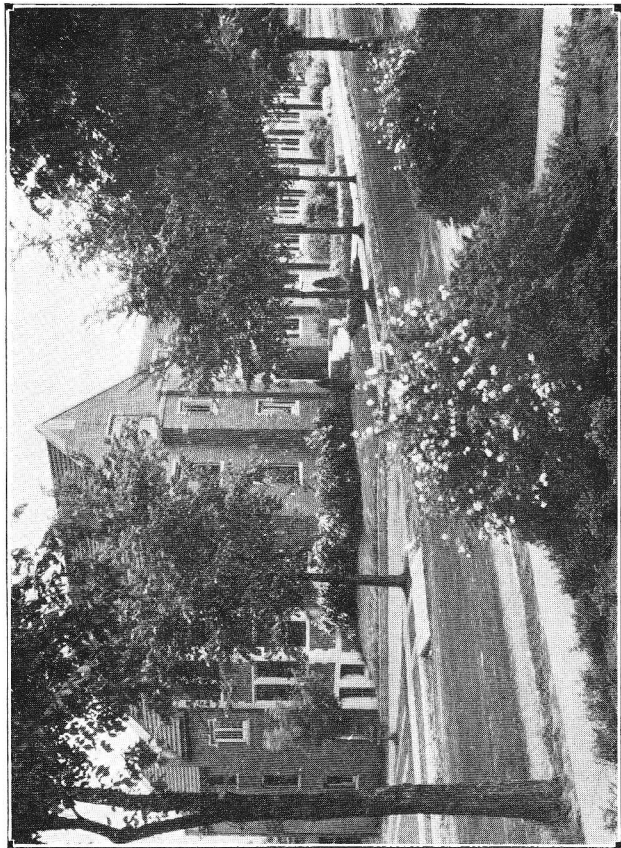
At the advanced age of eighty-six years and after a lingering illness, Francis Henry Peters passed away August 8, 1924, at the family residence, 2236 St. Louis Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri, survived by his widow, seven children, fifteen grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. ~ ~ ~

Because of the fact that Mr. Peters lived his life in the shadow of the Cross and made most of his contributions merely as coming from "A friend" without further reference to its source, the Church at large came to think of him as a kindhearted "friend," to whom no worthy cause appealed in vain. He was a friend of the widows and orphans; a friend of little Sunday School children, a friend of Christian Ministers, the Church at home and abroad, and of Christian education. It was thought fitting, therefore, that the writer, in speaking at the burial service in Sidney Street

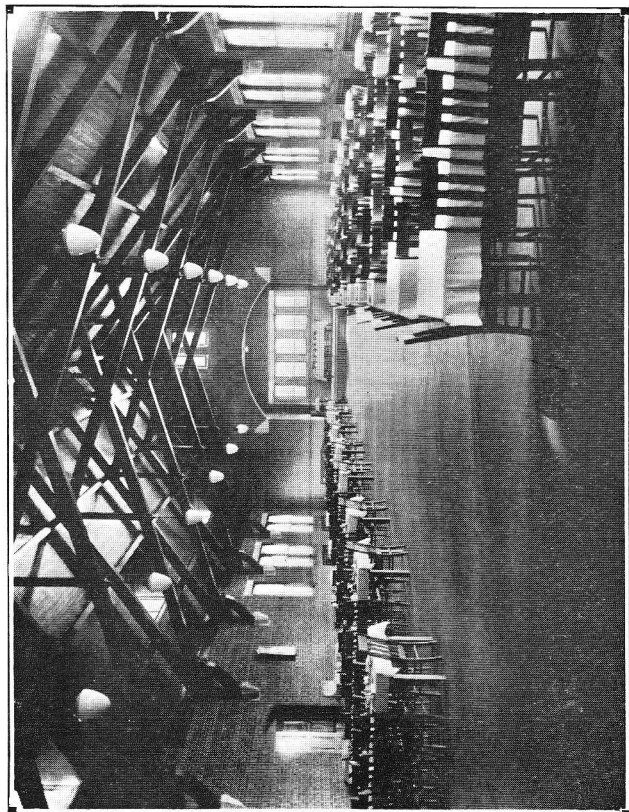
Church, should choose as his text the words of Jesus, concerning Lazarus: "Our friend sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep." (John II, ii) ~ ~

When on the occasion of a visit to the University of Dubuque, a year after his passing, his widow entered Peters Commons and in company with two of her children stood before the picture of her departed husband, which is exhibited prominently in the lobby, tears streamed down her face as she said in a whisper that was almost a prayer, "Our papa, he is not dead; I am far away from home and yet I realize even here that he liveth." It was an eloquent tribute in a few simple words. Can any more be said? Real friends never die; they will be waiting for us on eternity's golden shore. ~ ~ ~

"Friends will be there I have loved long ago
Joy like a river around me will flow
Yet just a smile from my Saviour, I know,
Will through the ages be glory for me."



PETERS COMMONS, at the University of Dubuque, Dubuque, Iowa.
One of Mr. Peters' many gifts to that institution



Dining Hall and Auditorium in
PETERS COMMONS