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The City's Wants, and the Church's Work.

A DISCOURSE

FOR

CITY MISSIONS.

BY

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SERMON 5

“Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one.”—JOB 14: 4.

NOTHING strikes a stranger more vividly on his entrance into New-York than the broad and startling contrasts. There is such a prodigious diversity between its different portions and its different people, that he might well wonder how they all belonged to one community. He passes up the great artery of our metropolis—perhaps the most brilliant street in the civilized world. The children of luxury and rank roll by him in the varied tints of the rainbow. Well-housed, well-fed, well-educated, and well-provided, as they are, they do not know what it is to suffer lack of any thing needful to their comfort. They walk life's *sunny side* in “silver-slippers.” To many of them existence is as merry as a marriage-bell.

But let that stranger turn suddenly out of that magnificent street when he gets abreast of that world-known region of wretchedness, the “Five Points.” The whole view changes in an instant! He has entered a new world! He has gone apparently a score of leagues; so wide is the contrast between the “clean” and the

“unclean.” The street into which he has turned, takes him down at one swift descent through a dozen distinct layers of society. Every grade of existence, as he advances, becomes darker, filthier, fouler, and more degraded, until he reaches the very dregs. Sickening odors come up from open cellars. Startling oaths ring out from subterranean dens. Children that have no sunshine on their brows—children that are mere itinerant piles of rags—children that never heard a mother pray, but only swear—the children that will yet occupy prisons, poor-houses, and brothels, (unless rescued in time,) are thronging the filthy sidewalks. Let us follow that stranger on his tour of exploration into some one of the rotting “rookeries” that overhang the pavement. As we enter, the broken door hangs by a single hinge. We grope up rickety stairways, amid strange sounds and stifling odors. We open one of the doors, behind which oaths and wild songs are ringing, and, at first sight, it seems as if a hut of New-Zealand savages has been revealed to us—or that a cage of wild animals has been opened by its keeper. Every square foot of filthy floor has some occupant. Upon it are stretched the wretched in their rags, and the drunken in their debauches. The old and the young, the black and the white, the sick and the sinning, all herd together as in a promiscuous sty. Hither the foot-pad brings his plunder—the beggar brings his refuse food—the poor, shameless daughter of sin brings her booty, purchased by the price of her character, and of her immortal soul! Here they crouch down to sleep; here they grovel; here they drug their consciences with stupefy-

ing draughts of adulterated liquors; here they spend their *only* lives on earth; and when the abused, diseased, and corrupted frame can bear up no longer, here they die, *all in the dark*, and the pauper's grave receives their last loathsome relics!

And all this is to be witnessed every day within sound of New-York's one hundred church bells! All this within five minutes' walk of the great thoroughfare through which the wealth and refinement of this metropolis are constantly pouring. All this within reach of our abounding schools, with their open doors and daily teachings. Ah! we must not dream, however, that all these children of want and vice are growing up without education. They are not. They go to school, and are apt learners. *The Devil has his free-schools for them*, plentiful in number, and thorough in their instructions. He has his schools in the corner dram-shops, the gaming-house, the theatre, the brothel, and the very associations of every child with every other like itself. Those whom Christianity does not provide for, Satan takes care of. From his free-schools he graduates thieves for the prison, gamblers for the "dens," paupers for the almshouse, harlots for the pest-house, and ruined souls for perdition! What other graduates could we expect? For "who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one."

This leads us to the practical discussion of the theme before us to-night, which is, *the City's wants and the Church's work*. And first, let us apply it to the externals of city life. Let us look for a moment at the "whereabouts" of a large portion of our population,

the places where they live, and where many of them are dying off by inches. Of the people of New-York it is ascertained that eighteen thousand live underground. They are the occupants of cellars, and many of these cellars are little better than vaults. Damp, impure, and loathsome, they are only the *first* grave, from which the hapless occupant is soon carried off by the undertaker to his second grave. These cellars have no ventilation, and the air, with all its oxygen breathed out, becomes rank poison, instead of being the food of life. The poor lodgers in such caverns, for want of oxygen in the air to stimulate their systems, have recourse, all the sooner, to the bottle and the dram-shop. This is one of the fruitful sources of intemperance among us. Alcohol is sought as a stimulant to arouse and sustain the bodily systems that have been prostrated by want of healthful diet and the healthful oxygen of pure, wholesome air. Do you not see, my hearers, how directly the physical condition of the poor affects their moral condition and welfare? The dwelling of the body affects the body, which is the dwelling-place of the soul. If a human being is immured in a foul, pestilential cellar, deprived of wholesome food and fresh air—if his raiment is filthy and his whole system enervated and disordered, do you not see that it is almost impossible that his life should be any thing else than grovelling and debased? It will be a miracle if he do not sink into a pauper and a sot. For “who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one.”

In one neglected quarter of this huge city is a single lodging-room or den, in which one hundred outcasts,

of both sexes, herd together indiscriminately every night! They fling themselves upon the floor in the same tattered rags in which they have prowled the streets and wharves during the day. The policeman, with his lantern, must step cautiously as he treads his way among the breathing heaps of rags, huddled side by side, all through that dismal chamber. Oh! my brethren, how can Christianity lie down so quietly on its pillows of down, while these thousands of outcast humanity stretch themselves on the hard, bare floor, or else have not where to lay their weary heads?

And how can we look for the moral elevation of the human beings who spend their existence in such sties of uncleanness? How can we expect a clean heart and a clean life to come out of such putrid impurity? Who of us would not sink to the level of the brute when placed in such brutish circumstances? If the occupants of these haunts steal when in pinching want of bread—if they drink alcohol when in want of fresh air—if they swear and break the Sabbath, and practice a full-grown heathenism when in want of Christian care and teachings, must we not pity them quite as much as we censure them? And when the censure falls, let it not all fall upon them. They are guilty; but so are we. Their sins of commission are awful; but our sins of omission are the unquestionable source of a portion of this depravity and wretchedness. As we hang over the abyss in which they lie, and shudder at their degradation, each one of us may well say, "I am verily guilty concerning my brother!"

II. Having laid down this principle, that where the outward circumstances are so debased and corrupting, it is almost idle to look for cleanliness of life, I go on to my next position. It is this: Where the *heart* is left impure, it is impossible to expect any healthful moral issues to flow from such a heart. If the "fountain" within the breast be like a stagnant fen, the outflow must of necessity be like the ooze of the marsh, fetid and corrupting. For "out of the heart are the issues of the life."

I do not suppose that the hearts of the neglected poor in our alleys, or of the Popish emigrants that pour upon us from the steerage, are one whit more depraved by nature than yours or mine. But all the moral influences that have surrounded them from infancy have been as bad as possible. They have had bad training, bad homes, bad examples, and bad ideas ingrained into their souls ever since they had a being. Most of the "religion" they have ever attained to has been degrading superstition—the mummery of the mass-house, or the slavery of the confessional.

From hearts so corrupted, and so saturated with evil, we can not look for healthful issues. From the heathenized souls of the pauper-cellar, and the emigrant-garret, and the brothel, no sane man will expect the "peaceable fruits of righteousness." Shall lips that have been taught only the dialect of hell sing the praises of God? Will a "cage of unclean birds" send forth the fruits of the Spirit, which are love, and virtue, and meekness, and temperance, and godliness, and brotherly-kindness, and charity? Will Satan turn suicide?

Will sin destroy itself of its own accord? Will a depraved soul become, at its own bidding, a meet temple of the Holy Ghost? Can such "clean" results come, of themselves, from sources so hideously "unclean"? When the sewers of New-York begin to furnish a cool, sparkling Croton for our tables; when the loathsome ward of a cholera hospital begins to afford health to those who enter its polluted atmosphere, then, and not before, may we look for sobriety and religion to come forth unbidden from such haunts and hearts as I have been depicting to-night.

III. By this time you may inquire—where is the remedy? what can we do? To these inquiries we would reply, that, as no clean result can come from an unclean source, the primal remedy is to purify the *sources themselves*. This work is a double one. It must be applied both to the body and to the soul. The external man and the internal man should both be reformed. Each one of these processes is essential. The second is by far the most important; but in order to reach it, the first one must not be neglected. For it is no easy work to Christianize a ragged outcast, with a half-dozen layers of filth all over his frame, and no bread in his mouth but what he gets by begging or stealing. It is no easy task to Christianize a child by two hours of Sabbath-school teaching, while the devil has undisputed control over that child through all the hours of all the other six days of the week. It is no easy matter to make a vagrant girl obey either the seventh or the eighth commandment, if absolute want is driving

her to theft or to the sale of her womanhood to buy her bread. The soul must be cared for, and the physical condition, too. The Bible and the tract should be given to these outcasts; but a preliminary step is to do all we can to provide for them a clean face and a clean dress, and a better chance *to live without crime*. Let us endeavor to give them employment—to help them into places of livelihood. Let them learn to be, not paupers, but producers—not mendicants and plunderers, but self-respecting self-supporters. And then with this care for the perishing body let us give them the Gospel. Not as a cold abstraction or a theologic dogma do they need it, but as a plain, simple method of salvation, and as a practical rule of life. Let them have it free, and warm, and loving—just as it burst from Heaven in its fullness, just as it breathed from Calvary in its tenderness. Let it come to them in every possible channel—through the teacher, through the tract visitor, through the school, through the mission church, and through the efforts of private Christians; for *all* the disciples of Christ should covet a place in practical philanthropy.

Among the feasible schemes of Christian benevolence in this direction are *Ragged Schools* and “Houses of Industry.” The great aim of these institutions is to reach down to the most degraded strata, and elevate to the atmosphere of Gospel influence. In them children are taught to read the Bible—are instructed in useful trades in order to self-support—and are, in many ways, brought under the effective power of Christianity. Among the million dwellers in London this

class of institutions were set on foot; under the auspices of Lord Shaftesbury in that city, and of the lamented Chalmers in Edinburgh, they have already achieved most admirable results.

[Mr. Cuyler here gave an outline of one of these institutions, which had met with great success in London.]

Thus much for schools. Now, when we come to talk of churches, and the preaching of the word, the sad fact stares us in the face, that there are not houses of worship sufficient to accommodate more than one half the population of this island! Some one may inquire, if there has not been already an expenditure of money on church edifices fully equal to a supply of the whole population, provided that each building had cost no more than was positively needful for comfort? That is doubtless true. But we say to such an inquirer, the houses of worship in this city were not built by a governmental church, but by voluntary contributions, and in such style as the liberal givers preferred to erect them. Let not the costly churches, then, be razed to the ground. Let them stand as the goodliest ornaments of our proud metropolis; but let the favored classes who occupy them see to it that the poor are not left without the sanctuary and the bread of life. Every well-established evangelical church should sustain, in whole or in part, a mission among our home heathen. Every church should bear its part in maintaining an industrial school for vagrant children.

This subject of civic evangelization is complicated still farther by the enormous emigration from abroad.

The population of a small provincial city is landed on our wharves every week! Last Friday, when the fogs cleared away from our harbor, and an eastern breeze sprung up, an emigrant fleet bearing 12,000 souls came up the bay, and added to our population within six hours a larger number than the country lost during the whole war of 1812. Among these new-comers from Old-World superstitions, the City Missionary Society is doing its most effective work. During the last year we have sustained missionaries of Christ who have proclaimed the Gospel in that same tongue with which Martin Luther aroused Europe from the slumber of centuries. Jesus has been preached, too, by them in the rich, mellifluous tones of the language of Holland—that honored land of our fathers, which we once heard the Scotch Carlyle pronounce the “home of the bravest Protestant nation of the globe.” Among the foreign population of New-York this Society should be enabled to enlarge its operations at least ten-fold. For our only effective method of checking the Romanist is to out-work, and out-pray, and out-preach him. Wherever he comes, let him find the church already built and the school already established. Abuse will but disgust him; ridicule will irritate him; persecution will but build him up. What he dreads most and yet needs most is the free Gospel of the cross. The sooner we put our whole reliance for successful competition with Rome on the preaching of Christ in truth and love, the sooner will the good work be accomplished.

IV. As an argument for a thorough prosecution of

city reform and home missions, I might urge upon you the principle of *self-preservation*. It is not the highest argument indeed, but it is a strong motive. For as a community we are one. Fifth Avenue is linked to the Five Points; the dwellers on our elegant squares are at one with the dwellers in the pauper garrets. The advancement of each class is the advancement of the whole; the degradation of one class imperils all the rest. When one member suffers, all suffer. The self-styled "conservative" may wrap himself about with his own selfishness, and on the gorgeous sofas of his tapestried drawing-room may shut his eyes and close his ears to the wants and woes of the "rabble" multitudes. He may say to us, "Let them alone." But will they let us alone? Will they let *him* alone? He may leave the dram-shop unprohibited, but will the dram-shop leave his sons untempted? He may let the gaming-house go unsuppressed, but will the gamblers leave his clerk or apprentice untouched? He may refuse to make effort for the rescue of the wretched harlot who treads the midnight street, but she shall lay snares for him and his, perhaps to their undoing. He may allow the courts, and alleys, and cellars of the poor to fester in pollution and filth, but will the cholera, which they manufacture, hesitate to invade his lordly threshold?

But there is a higher argument for Christian hearts than this. It is the double argument, based on the moral glory of saving immortal souls, and on the honor which every such triumph brings to our crucified Master. Knowest thou, my brother! the value of that undying soul encased in one of those ragged outcasts?

“Behold the midnight glories of the heavens !
 Worlds on worlds ! amazing pomp !
 Redouble this amaze—ten thousand add,
 And twice ten thousand more ; then weigh the whole ;
That soul outweighs them all, and calls
 The astonishing magnificence of suns and planets
 Poor indeed !”

Each saved soul is a new trophy of the cross of Christ. Every ransomed soul is a new jewel in the diadem of his glory. Every tongue taught to sing his praise shall swell the hallelujah-anthems of his celestial temples ! I leave this argument for your consciences and your closets.

And now, as we take leave of this discussion, the one great question rolls back again upon us—How shall the portentous necessities of this vast city be met ? How can it be Christianized ? I know of but one sufficient answer, and that is, *Let the whole evangelical Church of New-York become one extended City Mission.* Let every one labor, in every direction, by every scriptural method of reform. To leave this stupendous work to a handful of ordained missionaries would be as preposterous as for the Sultan to send out a single regiment of Janizaries to conquer the colossal empire of the Czar. It would be as dishonoring to the Church, as it would be for a congregation to require their pastor to do all their praying, and a church choir to do all their praising. The Christians of this city *need* this work for their own spiritual growth, and the work needs all of them to secure its accomplishment.

Do you ask, “What can I do ?” Study the Christ-like

biographies of Harlan Page and Isabella Graham; and find there an answer. Have you not lips to speak for Christ? Have you not hands to work for Christ? Have you not a purse on which you can inscribe, "Holiness to the Lord"? Have you not a heart to pray for dying humanity? Can you not teach in the Sabbath-school? Can you not bear a part in the Ragged-school? Can you not go out into personal visitation and personal relief of the wretched, and the ignorant, and the friendless? To-night I ask another good office at your hands. I entreat you to give cheerfully and largely to the support of our own City Missions. This work belongs to us, as the descendants of those who brought the doctrines of the Synod of Dort to the temples and the altars of this young republic. Let us prove that the Dutch Church has not only wealth but works, not only ancestry but activity, not only prudence but progress, not only good doctrines but good deeds of philanthropy and love.

But our Master will not let us compound with him by giving of our substance to sustain others in lieu of giving our own exertions. He requires personal effort. Growth in grace requires personal effort. Every one of us can be a missionary of some description. "Let him that would be greatest among you become servant of all." The truest method of elevating our own souls is to elevate the souls of others. Why is it that so many professed Christians "feel above" (as the phrase goes) undertaking labors of love and duty? Did the Lamb of God "feel above" the woes of Gethsemane for us, or the unutterable agonies of Calvary? Some are unwill-

ing to take a part in the Sabbath-school, or the Ragged-school, strangely forgetting that the Redeemer was a teacher, and that little children were the peculiar objects of his loving care. Some will not consent to distribute bread or Bibles among the needy and unclean, not remembering that their Divine Master "went about doing good"—that he was himself a colporteur and a missionary. Others seem to regard the prayer-meeting a place of humiliation; and so it ought to be in one sense, but not in the sense in which they understand it. Have such never learned that the post of honor is the post of usefulness?

"My seat in the Sabbath-school," said our beloved and honored Frelinghuysen, "is higher than my seat in the Senate." The pulpit is loftier in God's sight than an imperial throne. A missionary is greater than a monarch. Let him who *serves* the most faithfully and *saves* the most successfully be accounted worthy of the starry crown!

For lo! in accents sweet and strong,
 Sounds in our ears the word—
 "More laborers for the harvest now,
 More reapers for the Lord!"

We'll rally to the call—no more
 In selfish dreams to lie;
 But, girded for the Saviour's work,
 Go forth beneath the sky!

Into thy vineyard, blessed God,
 To do thy will we come,
 Thrust in our sickles at thy word,
 Till we shout our Harvest-Home!

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