

OUR FIGHT WITH TAMMANY

BY

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CHAPTER XI

THE PULPIT AND POLITICS

THERE has been, during the past three years, a good deal of discussion as to the relation proper to exist between the pulpit and municipal politics. I have had no disposition to crowd my own views of that matter upon others' acceptance. Having reached a conviction of my own, I acted accordingly; and while recognizing that others have as much right to their opinion as I to mine, it has sometimes seemed as though, if, instead of spending so much time in publishing and fortifying their opinion, they had dropped argumentation and gone to work to minister to the city in some better way of their own, it would have saved a great deal of unnecessary rhetoric and accomplished more toward recovering us from our municipal dishonor.

While, however, I had no wish to force my opinions upon others, I was very willing to express them to any that were desirous of hearing them, and accordingly, at the request of the Alumni of the Union Theological Seminary, in this city, prepared the following address (which seems to me not out of place

in a record of this kind), and which was delivered at the Seminary Building on the 14th of May, 1894, as follows :

I am to speak of the relation of the minister to good government. In order to avoid all misapprehension, let us start out by saying that nothing should be allowed to interfere with the pulpit's prime obligation to convert men, women, and children to Christ in their individual character. No one can have attended carefully to Christ's method of working in the world without appreciating the emphasis which he laid upon the *individual*, and without feeling the volume of meaning there is in the fact that so many of his finest words and deepest lessons were delivered in the presence of but a single auditor. There are no associate results which do not hide all their roots in the separate individualities that combine to compose such association.

At the same time, what God thinks most of is not a man in his individual character, but men in their mutual and organized relations. That is the idea that the Bible leaves off upon, and in that way throws upon the idea the superb emphasis of finality, culminating, as Scripture does, not in the roll-call of a mob of sanctified individualities, but in the apocalyptic forecast of a *holy city* come down from God out of heaven ; not men, therefore, taken as so many separate integers, but men conceived of as wrought up into

the structure of a corporate whole—social, municipal, civic.

Men require to be sanctified, but the relations which subsist between them require to be sanctified also. Philemon was a Christian and Onesimus was a Christian; but Onesimus was still Philemon's slave. Philemon had been converted, and Onesimus had been converted, but the *relation* between them had not been converted. A good part of every man is involved in his relations, and heaven is not arithmetic but organic.

Wherever men rub against one another, therefore, the pulpit has something to say, or ought to have something to say. This enhances prodigiously the opportunities and obligations of the pulpit, and ought to affect and modify very seriously the preparation where-with a young man equips himself for pulpit service. It is simply appalling, the area of inquiry which at once opens itself before him and challenges his regard so soon as he realizes that the consummation of his mission is not to save from hell as many separate people as he can, but to become, in God's hands, the means of saving society here and now, and precipitating heaven by constructing as much terrestrial heaven as possible out of materials already in hand. That is an idea that is working in the current mind, and that our theological seminaries are beginning to evince symptoms of regard for. It is a conception of the case that is well-nigh staggering so soon as you begin

to realize how little of a man's practical life is an individual affair, and what a vast percentage of it concerns him in his relations to his fellows.

You may take a very large percentage of the great questions that are always under discussion—social questions and political questions—and you will discover that such questions are nothing more nor less than crystallizations about an ethical nucleus. They are not altogether ethical, but they revolve on an ethical axis, and the pulpit wants to be prepared to manipulate such questions with a firm hand, rend the ethical elements from such as are morally indifferent, and then take the ethical elements in their clear separateness and exhibit them, by which I mean *preach them*. There is not a live question in society or in State to-day that is not nine-tenths of it a question of morals. And before the pulpit handles it it has got to know how much of it lies within ethical ground and how much without; for woe be to the preacher who undertakes to deal homiletically with such aspects of a question as are relevant not to the pulpit but to the expert.

All of this work means straining solidity of preparation. It is worse than Greek, tougher than Hebrew, or than almost any of the other antiques that ordinarily ornament the curriculum of a theological seminary. Undoubtedly the handling of these matters in the pulpit means friction. But there will always be friction when there is power on its way to effect, so that need

not alarm anybody. History is going up hill, not down, and that always means heated bearings and squeak in the wheels.

Of course there is a way of preaching that will keep the axles cool. Unquestionably we might expatiate eloquently on historic unrighteousness, and the greater the eloquence the greater the favor with which we should be followed. We can malign David for his vices, and pour canister-shot into poor Solomon for his irregularities; and his being a back number and having no extant relatives to pound you with a libel suit, the whole performance reduces to an elegant sedative, just warm enough to stimulate the blood if the church is cold, and cold enough to discourage perspiration if it is July.

Here are certain moral ideas to be pushed. Who is going to push them if the pulpit does not? Here are certain breaches of moral propriety and decency on the part of the national or the municipal government. Who is going to protest, if the pulpit does not? Do you say that that is going outside of your diocese? Well, what is your diocese? Are you one of God's prophets, visioned with an eye that sees right and wrong with something of the distinctness of divine intuition, and are you going to let that wrong lie there as so much ethical rot and close your eyes to it and pray, "Thy kingdom come?"

That was the superb feature of the old prophets of the Hebrews: they were statesmen; they so grasped

the times in their living and pregnant realities that everything stood out before their inspired and burning thought in solid relation to the Kingdom of God. There was no splitting up of things into holy and civic. That splitting and slicing process is one of the old serpent's shrewdest devices for getting the biggest half of the world in the range of his own quivering fangs. Those old prophets of the Hebrews were statesmen. They could not help being. Their eye went so deep and wide that of necessity they flung their arm about everything. There is not a great deal of statesmanship in the pulpit to-day, and outside of it there is not any—that I know of. There is politics, but there is not statesmanship. Do you know what the difference is between statesmanship and politics? Well, politics is statesmanship with the moral gristle left out. Politics in certain respects is a good deal worse than depravity, pure and simple. Thoroughbred depravity has the courage of its viciousness. About politics there is just that tincture of decency that makes it unreliable. I have had to deal with men that were elaborately and consistently wicked, and I have had to deal with politicians, and I would rather cope with ten of the former than one of the latter. The politician is like one of those agile and cheerful little beasts which, if you put your hand where he isn't, he's there; and put your hand where he is, and he isn't there.

So I say, where are you going to get your states-

manship unless you get it from the prophets and the pulpits? It used to abound at Washington. How long has it been since anybody at Washington has stood up in the strength of a Wilson, a Sumner, a Webster, or an Elijah, and spoken the word that has drawn to a snigger tension the moral sense of this great people? We used to have speeches made there that would ring clear across the continent, and clear the air for a decade. There are themes enough to talk about now, and there are brains enough to talk about them, but it takes something besides brains to lift to a higher tone the national conscience, and to stimulate to a quicker and fuller pulse the national life. There is not the Samson at Washington that will fling his arms about the two pillars and bow himself mightily, for while he might like to shake off the Philistines on the roof, he fears more the inconvenience of being dusted by the *débris* and crushed on the underside of the collapse. We never feel quite so confident of the perpetuity of American institutions as we do just after Congress has adjourned, and Senators and Representatives have packed their gripsacks and gone home. We feel about Congress in our civic relations very much as most of us here to-day do about General Assembly in our ecclesiastical relations,—we wish that it were at least four years between sessions: in fact the longer the better.

And I am afraid we shall not be much better rewarded for our quest if we search for statesmanship in the

files of the newspaper press. This is not denying the braininess of the press, nor its power, nor the immense value of the service which it renders along specific lines. But when you come to consider the secular press as a *moral* force, it is not there. I do not mean that there is no paper published, no paper in this city published, that is a quickener of the moral energies of this city and community. What I mean is that the daily press is, with hardly an exception, run by its business end. The editorial page is definitely determined by monetary considerations. Journals are not printed for the sake of stating and pushing the truth. No man can ever do a thoroughly good thing when he is primarily motivated thereto by the dollar. You cannot preach an inspiring sermon when you feel the money there is in it, nor any more can you fill a column with editorial electricity when you feel the money there is in it. The more a paper puts in the pockets of its stockholders, the less, probably, it puts into the hearts and lives of its readers. Under existing conditions, then, you cannot with much confidence look to the newspapers for statesmanship, for statesmanship has got to have an ethical element, and ethics doesn't pay. If you go into ethic business, you will have to dispense with terrapin or live on a legacy.

So that at present if you are going to have statesmen you will have to look to the pulpit for them. And there is not a better place for them. There is no place where one would have any better right to ex-

pect them to abound. Ninety per cent. of the material of social and civic questions being ethical, what reason is there why pulpit prophets should not marshal the army of event? They used to do so, why shouldn't they now? If there is any Moses who can climb onto the top of Sinai and commune with God and behold with an unabashed eye the realities that compose the tissue of all history, why should he not lead the waiting host when he gets back to the foot of the mountain? Why leave it to dirty Aaron, who meantime has been stripping the people and building golden calves?

I am not talking about holding the offices! To the evil one with your offices! I am talking about holding the sceptre over the consciences of people and swinging them into beat with the pulse of the heart of God, and into pace with the trend of his eternal purpose. That is the only governance we have any care for, and it is the only governance that governs too. Talk about the diminishing power of the pulpit? There is power enough if the pulpit will rise to the stature of its prophetic dignity, and assert itself and exercise its power. I do not believe that so far forth the pulpit was ever so powerful as it is to-day. I do not believe that virtue ever respected it more, or that vice ever hated it and feared it more than it does to-day. If the pulpit is honest, intelligent, untrammelled, anxious for nothing so much as to be the oracle of God and to see the Lord's Prayer turned into history, why, there is nothing that can stand alongside

of it in point of conscious and confident authority. It seizes questions on those sides that are correlated with the conscience, and handles them with that poise of assurance and challenge that stirs up no end of malignity perhaps, but that allows no room for retreat ; handles them, too, with that long regard and with that impassioned sense of whatsoever is eternal that obviates the necessity of partisan discount. There is not a knave in this city, nor any corporation of knaves, that would not rather have its character portrayed by the most influential journal in town, than to have it portrayed by a Christian minister ; always being understood though by a Christian minister, one who tells the truth as before God and only for the truth's sake, and who is prepared to keep telling it till he wears through the epidermis into the quick.

When you know you are right, and can feel it all through you, just as distinctly as Elijah, standing up in front of Ahab, felt the three years' drought that was coming, there is a dash of omnipotence in the word you speak. Its censures fall upon current iniquity with the hard thud of a sledge-hammer. The possibilities of all statesmanship are in it, for it beholds as with prophetic vision, the thread of eternal principle upon which alone the events of history can be permanently strung ; and so is qualified, as with the incisiveness and fearlessness of prophetic utterance, to state eternal principle in a manner to the bracing of virtue and the paralysis of vice.

And I am saying what I know. I uttered only thirty minutes of indictment against the blood-sucking scoundrels that are draining the veins of our body municipal, and they were all set wriggling like a lot of muck-worms in a hot shovel. I am not such a fool as to suppose that it was the man that said it that did the work ; nor that it was what was said that did the work, for it had been said a hundred times before with more of thoroughness and detail.

It was the pulpit that did the work. Journalistic roasting these vagabonds will enjoy and grow cool over. But when it is clear that the man who speaks it is speaking it not for the purpose of putting money into his pocket or power into his party, but is speaking it because it is true, and in speaking it appreciates his oracular authority as one commissioned of God to speak it, there is a suggestion of the Judgment-Day about it, there is a presentiment of the invisible God back of it, that knots the stringy conscience of these fellows into contortions of terror. Waning power of the pulpit? There is all of power in the pulpit that there is of God voicing Himself through the man who stands in the pulpit.

Now, my brethren in the Christian ministry, here is a field for you ; a field that is as broad as your intelligence, and as vast as the indwelling Spirit with which you have been divinely baptized. It is *your* field. If your ministry is being rendered in this city, for instance, the associate life of this city, with all of civic

concern that goes to make up that life, is as justly subject to the mastery of your inspired and imperial words as were the people of Israel amenable to the holy dictatorship of a Moses, a Samuel, an Elijah. Do not allow yourselves to be ostracized from your own kingdom and your own throne either by custom, cowardice, or the devil. I know we are told that we ought not to mix in the earthy pursuits or to trail our clerical robes through the dust of this secular life! The idea of a rabble of cut-throats, thieves, thugs and libertines presuming to stand up and tell God's prophets to keep their hands off of the ark of the covenant when the sole regard they have for the ark is their sacrilegious appetite for the golden pot of manna that is preserved in the interior of the ark! Don't let these dirty hypocrites fool you. There is moral material enough in community but it lacks leadership. The prophets of God are here to meet that exigency. That is what they are for; to foster and train moral sentiment, to compact and marshal it, and hold it along lines of earnest and intelligent devotement to the common weal.

This does not at all involve entrance into the details of matters and becoming personally complicated in the intricacies of administration. That is another affair altogether, and one for which the prophet's previous training can scarcely be supposed to make him competent. But the determinative factor in all personal government (as opposed to brute govern-

ment) is a matter of moral sentiment, and that is a commodity of which God's pulpit servants are, *ex officio*, the priests.

There are all sorts of influences — the influence of self, the influence of self-seeking, the influence of partisanship — which is simply self-seeking on an enlarged scale — there are all sorts of influences that are operating powerfully to degrade the quality of associate life, and to debase the tone of civic administration, and the pulpit is the source to which you have got to look for that counteracting energy which shall set truth and righteousness before the people in that substantiality of body and definedness of outline which shall quicken the thought, impress the conscience, invigorate the purpose, nerve the arm, and drive sneaking iniquity to cover. Try to conceive what would be the effect upon this city if but a dozen of the representative prophets of each of the denominations were to conceive of themselves, severally, as standing before the collective and impersonated depravity of our municipality in the same attitude of conscious divine authority in which Elijah confronted Ahab; by next November you would not have enough Tammany Hall left to make it real interesting to depict it.

My brethren in the Ministry, if I have spoken earnestly I have spoken so because I feel the situation and know that not a word has been uttered but what is as true as holy-writ. Our national security, the achieve-

ment of what we believe to be our national destiny is not a matter of wealth nor of population, nor of territorial area, it is a matter of national righteousness; it is a matter of honest laws honestly executed. It is a matter of nominating to positions of official responsibility, and electing when they have been nominated, and sustaining when they have been elected, men who are God-fearing, who respect truth because it is true, righteousness because it is holy, and who conceive of office as a sacred trust, and a holy stewardship. Now, brother, to take an overt and aggressive position in pursuance of that end, eulogizing official integrity and damning official corruption, is part of the duty to which you are called. There is no man that can do it or that can begin to do it with so much effect as an accredited and anointed prophet of God. Men do not care for men, but words that betray the symptoms of a divine sanction fasten upon the soul with a grip that cannot be dislodged, and the hope of the new American civilization, like that of the ancient Hebrew, is still vested in them whom God has chosen to be His prophets.