

OUR FIGHT WITH TAMMANY

BY

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CHAPTER II

THE MADISON SQUARE PULPIT'S ANALYSIS OF TAMMANY

THE events related in the previous chapter led up to the discharge of what may perhaps be called, "The First Gun of the Campaign," the sermon preached in Madison Square Church, Sabbath morning, February 14, 1892.

No notice had been given of its delivery and no one was less suspicious than the preacher himself of the disturbing effect it would produce. He was so thoroughly persuaded of the truth he spoke, that it came to him as a surprise that community should become in any degree wrought up over it. As one of the links in the chain of sequence, the discourse is here inserted substantially as delivered.

"Ye are the salt of the earth."—Matthew v. 13.

That states illustratively the entire situation. It characterizes the world we live in; it defines the functions of the Christianity that has entered into the world, and it indicates by implication the stint which it devolves upon each Christian man and woman of us to help to perform. These words of our text occur in

what we have learned to know as "The Sermon on the Mount," or what we might properly designate as Christ's statement of fundamentals. In this sermon He is putting in His preliminary work: He is laying a basis broad and deep enough to carry everything that will be laid upon it later. And it is one of the impressive features of the matter that the Founder of Christianity so distinctly foresaw that practical and concrete relation with the world into which the new faith was to come, and that so early in His ministry as this He announced that relation in terms so simple and unmistakable.

Ye are the salt of the earth. This, then, is a corrupt world, and Christianity is the antiseptic that is to be rubbed into it in order to arrest the process of its decay. An illustration taken from common things, but which states at a stroke the entire story. The reason for selecting the above Scripture, and the burden that is upon my mind this morning is this: that current Christianity seems not in any notable or conspicuous way to be fulfilling the destiny which the Lord here appoints for it. It lacks distinct purpose, and it lacks virility. We are living in a wicked world, and we are fallen upon bad times. And the question that has been pressing upon my heart these days and weeks past has been—What can I do?

We are not thinking just now so much of the world at large as we are of the particular part of the world that it is our painful privilege to live in. We are not

saying that the times are any worse than they have been ; but the evil that is in them is giving most uncommonly distinct tokens of its presence and vitality, and it is making a good many earnest people serious. They are asking, What is to be done? What is there that I can do? In its municipal life our city is thoroughly rotten. Here is an immense city reaching out arms of evangelization to every quarter of the globe ; and yet every step that we take looking to the moral betterment of this city has to be taken directly in the teeth of the damnable pack of administrative bloodhounds that are fattening themselves on the ethical flesh and blood of our citizenship.

We have a right to demand that the Mayor and those associated with him in administering the affairs of this municipality should not put obstructions in the path of our ameliorating endeavors ; and they do. There is not a form under which the devil disguises himself that so perplexes us in our efforts, or so bewilders us in the devising of our schemes as the polluted harpies that, under the pretence of governing this city, are feeding day and night on its quivering vitals. They are a lying, perjured, rum-soaked, and libidinous lot. If we try to close up a house of prostitution or of assignation, we, in the guilelessness of our innocent imaginations, might have supposed that the arm of the city government that takes official cognizance of such matters, would like nothing so well as to watch daytimes and sit up nights for the purpose of

bringing these dirty malefactors to their deserts. On the contrary, the arm of the city government that takes official cognizance of such matters evinces but a languid interest, shows no genius in ferreting out crime, prosecutes only when it has to, and has a mind so keenly judicial that almost no amount of evidence that can be heaped up is accepted as sufficient to warrant indictment.

We do not say that the proposition to raid any noted house of assignation touches our city government at a sensitive spot. We do not say that they frequent them ; nor do we say that it is money in their pockets to have them maintained. We only say (we think a good deal more, but we only say) that so far as relates to the blotting out of such houses the strength of the municipal administration is practically leagued with them rather than arrayed against them.

The same holds true of other institutions of an allied character. Gambling-houses flourish on all these streets almost as thick as roses in Sharon. They are open to the initiated at any hour of day or night. They are eating into the character of some of what we are accustomed to think of as our best and most promising young men. They are a sly and constant menace to all that is choicest and most vigorous in a moral way in the generation that is now moving on to the field of action. If we try to close up a gambling-house, we, in the guilelessness of our innocent imagina-

tions, might have supposed that the arm of the city government that takes cognizance of such matters would find no service so congenial as that of combining with well-intentioned citizens in turning up the light on these nefarious dens and giving to the public certified lists of the names of their frequenters. But if you convict a man of keeping a gambling hell in this town you have got to do it in spite of the authorities and not by the aid of the authorities.

It was only this past week that a search-warrant was issued by one of the courts in town, and before the officer with his posse reached No. 522 Sixth Avenue, the action of the court reached there, and the house that is spoken of in Scripture as empty, swept, and garnished, was not, in point of unadorned vacuity, a circumstance to the innocent barrenness of the gambling-rooms in question. I do not say that the judge of Jefferson Market Police Court was responsible for the slip. I do not believe that he was, at least in any direct way. All that is intended by the reference is that the police court leaked. With hardly the shadow of a doubt that court, in some one of its subordinates at any rate, stands in with the gamblers, and to that degree the court becomes the criminal's protector and guardian angel. This is mentioned only as illustration of the fact that some people understand, and that all people ought to understand, that crime in this city is intrenched in our municipal administration, and that what ought to be a bulwark against crime is

a stronghold in its defence. We strike the same difficulty again when we come to matters of excise.

No one can have followed the crusade that has been in progress these last weeks against unlicensed saloons or against saloons that have been open in unlicensed hours, and have a solitary shred of doubt that every conviction of a saloon-keeper is obtainable only by a square fight with the constituted authorities. The police do not take the initiative. What has been done during the last six weeks has been done because the outraged sentiment of decent people voicing itself through the press has rendered it impossible for what we amuse ourselves by calling the guardians of the public peace and virtue, vulgarly known as the police, to do otherwise than bring some criminals to justice, or at least to threaten to do so. Unless all signs are misleading, your average policeman or your average police captain is not going to disturb a criminal, if the criminal has means, if he can help it.

We are saying nothing as to the connection there is between the criminal's means and the policeman's indulgence. We only state in explanation that it is the universal opinion of those who have studied longest and most deeply into the municipal criminality of this city, that every crime here has its price. I am not saying that that is so, but that the more intently any man of brains scrutinizes these matters the more he discovers along this line that is of an intensely interesting nature. I should not be surprised to know that

every building in this town in which gambling or prostitution or the illicit sale of liquor is carried on has immunity secured to it by a scale of police taxation that is as carefully graded and as thoroughly systematized as any that obtains in the assessment of personal property or real estate that is made for the purpose of meeting municipal, State, or Federal expenses current. The facts do not always get to the surface, but when they do they let in a great lot of light into the subterranean mysteries of this rum-besotted and Tammany-debauched town.

Near the beginning of the year the Grand Jury considered the matter of indicting the keeper of a notorious resort on Fourteenth Street. (I am giving the case as it was presented in one of our most trustworthy journals, and has, I believe, not been contradicted). There was no legal evidence at hand that would be sufficient to convict, and the District-Attorney was asked to secure some. An innocent imagination would have supposed that he would jump at the opportunity. The request was repeated by the Grand Jury, apparently without effect. His hesitancy may have been due to either one of two causes. He may have known so much about the establishment that he did not like to touch it, or he may have known so little about it that he was sceptical as to the truth of the derogatory reports that were in circulation in regard to it. Indeed, the District-Attorney said to me in his own house four weeks ago that until after McGlory's

establishment was raided he had no idea that institutions of so vile a character existed in this city. All we can say is that we must give the young man the benefit of the doubt. Such a case is truly affecting. Innocence like that in so wicked a town ought not to be allowed to go abroad after dark without an escort. But to return to our narrative.

Our guileless District-Attorney, with the down of unsuspecting innocence upon his blushing cheek, failed to respond to the demands for evidence made upon him by the Grand Jury. The jurors themselves, therefore, assumed experimentally the character of detectives, and the proprietor of the place was soon caught, of course, in the act of illegal selling. An indictment was then found. It remained to secure witnesses that would be willing to go on the stand and testify; for while the jurors were willing to visit the place and satisfy their own minds of the illegality of what was going on there, they experienced a natural delicacy in having their names publicly associated with such a resort in the published reports of criminal procedure. Accordingly instructions were given to the captain of the precinct to procure the necessary evidence. This was followed by another touching exhibition of modesty and blushing hesitancy. The fact of it is they all stand in with each other. It is simply one solid gang of rascals, half of the gang in office and the other half out, and the two halves steadily catering to each other across the official line. The captain declared reiter-

atedly that evidence against McGlory was something that he could not obtain, till finally the Grand Jury threatened to indict the captain himself, whereupon the evidence was at once produced and McGlory convicted upon it. All of which is only another way of saying that the most effective allies which McGlory had in the prosecution of his vile trade on Fourteenth Street were the District-Attorney and the captain of the precinct.

Now it may be said that this method of stating the case is injudicious; that it is unwise too sharply to antagonize the powers that be; that convictions will not be obtainable if we make enemies of the men who exercise police and judicial functions. On the contrary, there are only two kinds of argument that exercise the slightest logical urgency on the minds of that stripe of bandit—one is money and the other is fear. We shall gain nothing by disguising the facts. To call things by their right names is always a direct contribution to wholesome effects. A steamer can only make half-time in a fog. The first necessity of battle is to have the combatants clearly and easily distinguishable by the diversity of their uniform. We want to know what is what.

Every solid statement of fact is argument. Every time you deal with things as they are, and name them in honest, ringing Saxon, you have done something. It has always been trump-card in the devil's game to keep things mixed. He mixed them in Paradise, and

he has been trying to keep them mixed ever since. If the powers that are managing this town are supremely and concertedly bent on encouraging iniquity in order to the strengthening of their own position, and the enlargement of their own capital, what, in Heaven's name, is the use of disguising the fact and wrapping it up in ambiguous euphemisms ?

Something like a year ago, in company with a number of gentlemen, I conferred in his office with the highest municipal dignitary of this city in regard to the slovenly and the wicked way in which he was pretending to clean our streets. In what I had to say to him at that time I addressed him as though he were a man, and as though he had the supreme interests of this city at heart ; and I have been ashamed of myself from the crown of my head to the sole of my foot ever since. Saying nothing about the outrage a man commits upon himself by the conscious falsification of facts, it does not pay. Neither the devil nor any of his minions can be caught in a trap. You can hammer him, but you cannot snare him. Cajolery only lubricates the machinery of his iniquity. Petting him oils the bearings; minimizes the squeak and maximizes the velocity. Now this is not spoken in malice. It is not spoken without a recognition of the fact that there are men occupying official place in this city whose chief ambition it is to discharge their duties incorruptibly. Of course such exceptions are due to circumstances that it was beyond the power of domi-

nant influence to control. We have referred to such exceptions only for the purpose of anticipating the charge that our indictment has been harsh and indiscriminate.

But after all that has been said the great fact remains untouched and uninvalidated, that every effort that is made to improve character in this city, every effort to make men respectable, honest, temperate, and sexually clean is a direct blow between the eyes of the Mayor and his whole gang of drunken and lecherous subordinates, in this sense that while we fight iniquity they shield and patronize it; while we try to convert criminals they manufacture them; and they have a hundred dollars invested in manufacturing machinery to our one invested in converting machinery. And there is no scheme in this direction too colossal for their ambition to plan and to push. At this very time, in reliance upon the energies of evil that dominate this city, there is being urged at Albany the passage of a bill that will have for its effect to leave the number of liquor licenses unrestricted, to forbid all attempts to obtain proof of illicit sales, to legalize the sale of liquor after one o'clock on Sunday afternoon, and indeed to keep open bar 160 out of 168 hours of every week. Sin never gets tired; never is low-spirited; has the courage of its convictions; never fritters away its power and its genius pettifogging over side issues. What voluminous lessons the saints might learn from the sinners!

We speak of these things because it is our business as the pastor of a Christian church to speak of them. You know that we are not slow to insist upon keenness of spiritual discernment, or upon the reticent vigor of a life hid with Christ in God. Piety is the genius of the entire matter ; but piety, when it fronts sin, has got to become grit. Salt is a concrete commodity, and requires to be rubbed into the very pores of decay. I scarcely ever move into the midst of the busier parts of this town without feeling in a pained way how little of actual touch there is between the life of the church and the life of the times. As we saw last Sabbath morning, we must have a consciousness of God, but the truth complementary to that is that we must have just as lively a consciousness of the world we are living in. Men ought to have that, and women ought to have it too. Nobody that can read is excusable for not knowing what is transpiring. And Christians of either sex ought to know it and ought to want to know it ; ought to feel that it is part of their own legitimate concern to know it.

We have no criticism to pass on the effort to improve the quality of the civilization in Central Africa, but it would count more in the moral life of the world to have this city, where the heart of the country beats, dominated in its life and government by the ethical principles insisted on by the Gospel, than to have a belt of evangelical light a hundred miles broad thrown clear across the Dark Continent. And the men and

women that live here are the ones to do it. It is achievable. What Christianity has done Christianity can do. And when it is done it is going to be done by the men and women who stand up and make a business of the thing, and quit playing with it; quit imagining that somehow we are going, by some indescribable means, to drift into a better state of things.

Say all you please about the might of the Holy Ghost, every step in the history of an ameliorated civilization has cost just so much personal push. You and I have something to do about it. If we have a brain, or a heart, or a purse, and sit still and let things take their course, making no sign, uttering no protest, flinging ourselves into no endeavor, the times will eventually sit in judgment upon us, and they will damn us. Christianity is here for an object. The salt is here for a purpose. If your Christianity is not vigorous enough to help save this country and this city, it is not vigorous enough to do anything toward saving you. Reality is not worn out. The truth is not knock-kneed. The incisive edge of bare-bladed righteousness will still cut. Only it has got to be righteousness that is not afraid to stand up, move into the midst of iniquity and shake itself. The humanly incarnated principles of this Gospel were able in three centuries to change the moral complexion of the whole Roman Empire; and there is nothing the matter with the Christianity here except that the incarnations of it are lazy and cowardly, and

think more of their personal comfort than they do of municipal decency, and more of their dollars than they do of a city that is governed by men who are not tricky and beastly.

But you ask me perhaps what is the use of all this asseveration and vituperation; what is the good of protesting? What is the good of protesting? Do you know what the word Protestant means? Do you know that a Protestant is nothing but a protestant? A man who protests? And did not the men who protested in the sixteenth century do a good deal? Didn't they start a volcano beneath the crust of the whole of European civilization? Wherever you have a Luther, a grand stick of human timber, all afire with holy indignation, a man of God, who is not too lymphatic to get off his knees, or too cowardly to come out of his closet, confront iniquity, look it in the eye, plaster it with its baptismal name—such a man can start a reformation and a revolution every day in the year if there are enough of them to go around. Why, it makes no difference how thick the darkness is, a ray of light will cut it if it is healthy and spry.

Do you know that the newspapers had not been solidly at work for more than about four weeks before the dives began to close up? Why, the truth will frighten even a policeman, if you will lodge it where David did when he fired at Goliath. Truth, with explosive enough behind it, would scare even the captain of a precinct, and chase the blushes from the callow

face of the District-Attorney. We have had an example of that recently on a larger scale in the matter of the Louisiana lottery. The whole country was kindled into a flame of indignation, and the lottery men bowed before the storm. And, so far as the North was concerned, it was principally the doing of one man, too, a man who had a head, heart, and convictions, and a pen and lungs to back them.

You see that these things do not go by arithmetic, nor by a show of hands. A man who is held in the grip of the everlasting truth and is not afraid is a young army in himself. That is exactly what the Bible means when it says that one man shall chase a thousand. That is the way history has always gone. That is what the Bible story of Sodom means and the assurance that ten men would have sufficed to save it. Not ten that were scared, but ten men that so had the courage of their convictions, and that so appreciated the priestliness of the office to which they had been called that the multitudinousness of the dirty crowd they stood up among neither dashed their confidence nor quenched their testimony.

This is not bringing politics into the pulpit, politics as such. The particular political stripe of a municipal administration is no matter of our interest, and none of our business; but to strike at iniquity is a part of the business of the Church; indeed, it is the business of the Church. It is primarily what the Church is for, no matter in what connection that sin

may find itself associated and intermixed. If it fall properly within the jurisdiction of this church to try to convert Third Avenue drunkards from their alcoholism, then certainly it is germane to the functions of this church to strike the sturdiest blows it is capable of at a municipal administration whose supreme mission it is to protect, foster, and propagatate alcoholism. If it is proper for us to go around cleaning up after the devil, it is proper for us to fight the devil. If it is right to cure, it is right to prevent, and a thousand times more economical and sagacious. If we are not, as a church, transcending our jurisdiction by attempting to convert Third Avenue prostitutes from their harlotry, then surely we are within the pale of our authority as a church when we antagonize and bear prophetic testimony against an administration the one necessary outcome of whose policy it is to breed prostitutes. Republicans and Democrats we have nothing to do with, but sin it is our particular province to ferret out, to publish, and in unadorned Saxon to stigmatize ; and the more influential the position in which that sin is intrenched, the more painstaking and pronounced requires to be our analysis, and the more exempt from hesitancy and euphemism our characterization.

The only object of my appeal this morning has been to sound a distinct note, and to quicken our Christian sense of the obligatory relation in which we stand toward the official and administrative criminality that

is filthifying our entire municipal life, making New York a very hot-bed of knavery, debauchery, and bestiality, in the atmosphere of which, and at the corrosive touch of which, there is not a young man so noble, nor a young girl so pure, as not to be in a degree infected by the fetid contamination. There is no malice in this, any more than there would be if we were talking about cannibalism in the South Sea Islands; only that having to live in the midst of it, and having to pay taxes to help support it, and having nine-tenths of our Christian effort neutralized and paralyzed by the damnable pressure of it, naturally our thoughts are strained to a little snigger tension.

I have meant to be unprejudiced in my position, and conservative in my demands, but, Christian friends, we have got to have a better world, and we have got to have a better city than this is, and men who feel iniquity keenly and who are not afraid to stand up and hammer it unflinchingly and remorselessly, and never get tired of hammering it, are the instruments God has always used to the defeat of Satan and to the bringing in of a better day. The good Lord take the fog out of our eyes, the paralysis out of our nerves, and the limp out of our muscles, and the meanness out of our praise, show to us our duty, and reveal to us our superb opportunity, making of every man and woman among us a prophet, instinct with a longing so intense that we shall not be afraid, loving righteousness with a loyalty so impassioned that we

shall feel the might of it and trust it, and our lives become this day enlisted in the maintenance of the right, and thus show that Almighty God is mightier than all the ranks of Satan that challenge His claims and dispute His blessed progress.