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Our Pulpit.

The Social Problem.

SERMON PREACHED BY

REV. A. J. MOWATT

In St. Paul's Church, Fredericton Sunday morning Dec. 16th 1888.

"In as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."—MAT. XXV. 40.

We are here projected, as it were, far into the future, swept forward through the centuries to the consummation of all things. And I think it is well to be so now and again, for we are apt to be so taken up with our own little day and its affairs, so absorbed in this brief now of ours, that we are in danger of losing sight of the fact that there is to be a future at all, and especially that there is to be a last day, a day when all this that is going on must stop—this rush of business, this buying and selling, this pulling down and building up, this fortune-hunting, this pleasure-seeking, this good-doing even. But there is to be a last day. As there has been a first one, so there will be a last one.

And think what a day it will be, the day that is to have no to-morrow. The sun will rise as on other days, and laborers with sleeves rolled up will go to work, and trade will chaffer as loudly, and away on time the trains will rush, and to the altar the bride-groom will lead the blushing bride, and pleasure will laugh, and drunkenness will drink, and crime will go on with its evil-doing, and men will meet one another on the street, and talk of the weather, and hope it is going to be fine, and speculate on the season's prospects, and so forth, and so forth. But suddenly the Son of man will be seen coming in the clouds with power and great glory, the whirlwinds and lightnings His steeds and chariot, and the angelic hosts His attendants, and with white faces, the blood freezing in their veins, and terror and horror possessing them, men will look up, and say to one another: "The last day!" The trumpet will sound, and forth from the chaos of a burning world, and falling stars, and flaming heavens, men will gather to judgment. On a great white throne the Judge of men and angels will sit, and before Him shall be assembled the nations of men, the peoples of every age and clime, a vast multitude that no man can number, and by means of white-winged angel-ushers He will arrange them into two great Divisions, the good on His right, and the bad on His left. And then to the good on His right He will speak words of welcome, inviting them to come and share with Him the blessedness of His kingdom: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was an hungered and ye gave me meat, I was thirsty and ye gave me drink, I was a stranger and ye took me in, naked and ye clothed me, I was sick and ye visited me, I was in prison and ye came unto me." And then turning to those on His left, He will say to them in words strangely terrible for Him to speak and them to hear: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was an hungered and ye gave me no meat, I was thirsty and ye gave me no drink, I was a stranger and ye took me not in, naked and ye clothed me not, sick and in prison and ye visited me not." And then the awful judgment pageant will close with the eternal separation of good and bad, the good ascending to the endless blessedness of Heaven, and the bad going away to the unending horrors and despair of Hell.

Now, with that grand judgment-scene as a sort of background, or perhaps I should say foreground, for it is still in the future, I am to preach to you today on the social problem that faces us with its hard facts whichever way we turn; namely, how best to relieve and save the wretched of men, the poor, the homeless and friendless, the sick and unfortunate, the lapsed and criminal classes.

And first, consider the reality of such a problem, the grim fact that there are want and woe, and we have to do with them. We shut our eyes to many things we do not want to see, and close our ears to many things we do not wish to hear, and fold up our useless hands to many things we do not care to help, and so ignore the existence of certain great social facts that lie around us, and over which we have to stumble almost every step we take. But we cannot thus long ignore the fact that a Lazarus full of sores is at our gate, and that crime is growing into enormity in our streets, for they speedily drag us to judgment, and then we have to do with them whether we will or not.

Every considerable community, every city, every village, every country-place, have their paupers, their sick and old and indigent, their worthless and wicked, and the question what to do for them and with them, how to relieve their need, how best to help them, how to lift them up and bless and save them, comes home in some shape to every ci-

zen and every christian, and it is a question that is not easy of solution. But there it is facing us, frowning upon us, and we must grapple with it, and work it out as we can. And let us at it with a do-or-die earnestness, for it comes to this, we must either overcome it, or it will overcome us—our modern civilization, our church life, our boasted progress, our good.

The Whitechapel murderer, whoever he is, and whatever his fiendish purpose is, whether he is a madman, or a cut-throat of the worst type, or one who thinks he has a mission of his own, and whose mission is to solve the social problem as Alexander untied the gordian knot, by the short sharp process of extermination, has at least done this;—he has called the whole christian world's attention anew to the social problem, and earnest men and women are coming together, and deliberating as to what is to be done for the poor and fallen of our cities. In London yonder, and more or less in every city, there are streets and districts where the wretched poor and lapsed classes crowd together, and there they starve, struggle, sin, sorrow, suffer, die. They are idle, useless, improvident, brought up to know nothing but evil, and driven often by sheer necessity to beggary, thievery, and abandoned modes of living.

Now, it is easy enough dipping one's pen into ink, and covering sheets of foolscap with tirades against modern churches for their failure in reaching the wretched poor and the wicked, and writing sentimental articles on the poverty and sin around about, and propounding impracticable theories and so on; and it is easy enough to stand up here and preach up charity, and denounce drunkenness and crime, and commend repentance and faith; but unhappily neither the press nor the pulpit reaches the question in any practical shape. And indeed it is a question that it is easier to write and talk about than to work out. Let us look at the difficulty of it, and then perhaps it will be clearer to us what can be done.

There are poor because they have no chance. They have been unfortunate. Sickness or accident has rendered them unfit for work, or thrown them out of it, or has loaded them with such a burden of debt that they are crippled, or the work they can do is so unremunerative that they are all the time in the greatest straits. Then there are poor who are poor because they will not be anything else. They will not work. They are idle, useless, bad. Give them work to do, and they will not do it, or they will do it so wretchedly that you will not want them to do it any more. You cannot trust them. You want to help them, but how can you help those who will not help themselves? And yet, that is how it is with the great mass of the poor. They have never been trained to work. They would rather beg than work, and they would rather steal than beg, and if there was anything easier and less riskful than stealing they would rather do that than steal.

You think perhaps, in your way of looking at it, that it is their misfortune, or the direst necessity, that men and women are poor and bad. But the awful truth is, in the most of cases, they are poor and bad, because they want to be, not because they need to be. You think they would be so glad to come to church, and send their children to Sabbath school, were they only taken by the hand, and encouraged, and invited, and helped. Now, as a minister of the gospel I have always made it a point, as far as it was within my power, to visit the homes of the poor, and wretched, and wicked, as well as those of the rich and good; and I have found this to be the great difficulty, that they did not want to be otherwise than they were. They wanted to be let alone in their sin. Put them into a well-furnished room, and in a week they would have it not fit for decency to go into. Clothe them neatly and respectably, and so soon again they would be in rags. Charity cannot help such people, relieve such poverty. It only encourages them to continue as they are; yea, it hurts them, for it pauperizes them.

Still, there is the problem, many shaped and monstrous-shaped, facing us wherever we turn, and we cannot escape from—the poverty, hunger, nakedness, shiftlessness, carelessness, Godlessness, ignorance, crime; nor can we afford to let it alone, for it will not let us alone. Thus the social problem is no visionary thing that we have but little to do with, but, on the contrary, it is a grim reality, that, like a lion, meets us right in the way, and so meets us that we must either take it by the throat, or it will take us by the throat.

And another thing that adds interest and importance to the social problem is this, the relation of Christ to it. He so identifies Himself with it that we cannot ignore it without ignoring Him. In these solemn searching words, He brings us face to face with the dreadful alternative: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me," or, "Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me."

Here is one, the poorest of the poor,

ragged, wretched, sick, a veritable Lazarus full of sores, and he comes to your door with his need, his sickness, and you do not like it. You tell him in rude words to take himself out of that. But beware, lest that beggar you are thrusting from you may be the Christ come back to earth again. When he knocks, it is the Christ who knocks. When he asks to be received, it is the Christ who asks to be received. "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

Our Lord tells us one of His own inimitable stories to illustrate the serious wrong we do ourselves, yea the judgment we bring upon ourselves, in neglecting the poor. The story is something like this. A rich man lived in a splendid house, and in grand style. He had many to wait on him, and a table loaded with comforts, and luxuries. He had his good qualities too. His door was wide open to his friends, and they were welcome to his table. It is not said that he was a cruel oppressor of the poor, that he made his wealth out of their bread, that his life was odious with licentiousness as is the case with many of the rich and great in our day, and that he was a bold blasphemer and reckless unbeliever. Nothing like that is said of him. Perhaps he was a regular attendant at the synagogue of the town he lived in, and was respected for his virtues and excellences. He was not better nor worse than many of his class, and I suppose if we were in his place, we would not do differently from the way he did. So many are good enough till they are put to the test, and then it is found they are utterly wanting. "Weighed in the balances, and found wanting."

The rich man was tested in this way. A poor wretch came begging to his gate. He was a most piteous object, hideous with disease, loathsome with festering sores. This creature asked to be fed from the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. His request was modest. He did not ask much. But the rich man spurned his petition, and utterly refused him both food and shelter. It was indeed a hard-hearted thing to do, a wicked thing to do. The poor wretch was unable to go a step farther; so he crept aside, and lay down and died through sheer neglect and exposure—died at the rich man's gate.

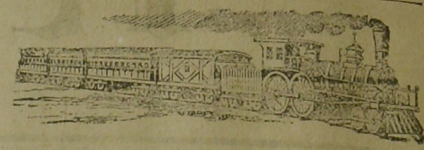
Now, Lazarus with his sickness and need at the rich man's gate, was the Christ at his gate in the person of one of His needy people. But the rich man did not know it and perhaps did not care. The poor man looked like one that neither Heaven nor earth cared for, one abandoned of God and man. But far otherwise. Underneath that unsightly exterior lay a gem of heavenly lustre, a crown jewel, one worthy to be in King's palaces. But the rich man, who looked only at showy appearances, in his ignorance and wickedness, flung from him the jewel, drove from his door the Christ hungry and sick, and so lost his opportunity and his reward. But the angels knew what was there, for they came fluttering with their white wings, and carried the jewel to Heaven.

And soon judgment came to the rich man. One day a rude intruder came knocking at his door that he would fain have kept out, but he could not. He would gladly have poured his wealth at his feet to get him to go away. But he spurned the rich man's gold, and laughed at his bolts and bars, and taking him grimly by the throat demanded his life, his niggard soul. Ah! poor rich man now! The next we see of him he is in direst need, and in unutterable pain, and there comes to him this awful word: "Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me."

Now, that thrilling Bible story is to teach us, that we too may have, in a very simple commonplace way, our opportunity of receiving or rejecting Christ, and we may lose it, we may fling it from us. To our door comes knocking the hunger of the streets, and the sickness and sorrow of the city, and we do so little to relieve it. Perhaps we fling it our crumbs, our broken-meats, and worn-out and cast-off garments. And that is something. That is better than the sick man did. But is it all we should do, if it is the Christ who comes to us in this way?

But you tell me, "Lazarus does not come to our door. Our poor are not good. It is their sin that makes them poor, their idleness, their intemperance, their thriftlessness and uselessness. And yet, are we sure that Christ does not sometimes come to us in these unworthy poor? You know, He was the friend of sinners. He despised not even publicans. He lifted up and helped even fallen women and leprous men. It may be our way of neglecting a duty, and shutting up our bowels of compassion, and being the rich man over again, to spurn from our door the unworthy poor, the wicked sick. In those faces bloated, and almost beastly, with intemperance; in those lives shapeless and hideous with gross immoralities; in that hunger and nakedness and want that need not be;—even there is something of Christ, something that Christ's love and pity, tears and blood, mercy and

Continued on third page.



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12.00 M.—For Fredericton Junction St. John and points east.

3.15 P. M.—For Fredericton Junction, St. John and points East.

ARRIVE AT FREDERICTON

9.25 A. M.—From Fredericton Junction St. John and all points East.

2.30 P. M.—From Fredericton Junction, Vanceboro, Bangor, Portland, Boston, and points West, St. John St. Andrew's, St. Stephen, Houlton, Woodstock.

7.15 P. M.—Express from St. John, and intermediate points, St. Stephen, Houlton, Woodstock and points north.

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1.00 A. M. Mixed for Woodstock, and points north.

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5.55 P. M.—Mixed from Woodstock, and points north.

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