

OUR NATIONAL SINS

DISCUSSED THOROUGHLY BY REV. GEO. BRUCE.

Of St. David's Church—Dishonesty at Ottawa—Sabbath Desecration, Intemperance, Covetousness Spoken of in this Connection.

One of those timely, able sermons that attract attention and cause thought was preached in St. David's church last evening by Rev. George Bruce. His text was taken from Proverbs xiv, 34: Righteousness exalteth a nation but sin is a reproach to any people.

It is my intention to speak to you tonight about some forms of national sin which have become a reproach to us, and I do so from two considerations.

In the first place, because next to the home, the church has the responsibility and the privilege of affecting the moral character of men and women for good; and it is only by making and keeping the lives of individuals pure and noble that we can have a true and elevated national character.

The second consideration is that certain forms of sin have become aggressive and notorious amongst us, may we have even become conspicuous by their evil prominence.

And while I do not usually make current events the subject of discourse, I feel that there are times when to be silent would be to bring upon ourselves the condemnation of the watchman who saw the enemy coming and gave no warning.

If I were to add another remark here it would be this, that under a form of government like ours we are not only responsible for our individual character and influence as citizens, but for the exercise of the power to mould the character of the legislation which is in our own hands. The nation is what the people make it. The strongest parliament is weak compared with the body of the people. Therefore I speak to you tonight not only as men and women intrusted in the well being of our beloved country, but as those who are responsible for the character and purity of its legislation and government.

I speak also with a full sense of my own responsibility in occupying the time and place of religious service, and I feel that no more important matter can be brought before you now, assured as I am that I have a message from God to you, and that your responsibility and mine is the greater and the more solemn because of the circumstances in which we are placed.

As to the different forms of evils to which I propose to make reference, there may not seem to be anything giving them a logical unity as parts of one subject or sermon, but there is another connection which binds them into one, the logic of fact and of their common relation to the same national life, showing them to be only different modes or manifestations of one disease.

Sabbath Desecration.

I. The first evil to which I shall refer is Sabbath desecration. When I mention this it may occur to some of you that I am thinking of one particular circumstance the latest advance in this line. I may say at once that I am not, that I am not limiting my thoughts to any single fact, to any particular form of Sabbath desecration. I wish rather to call your attention to the principle or motive which underlies the whole movement and which is at once hidden and revealed in the actions and words of those who are interested in the matter.

The question of Sabbath observance is a complex and difficult one to deal with and it becomes more complex as life becomes more complicated and the functions of business overlap one another.

It is a matter requiring careful thought and wise management to know how to preserve most effectively the Sabbath as a day of rest for man, and not to make that a hindrance and a burden which God intended as a refreshment and a blessing. To know how best to remember that since the Sabbath was made for man, God intended that he should not be deprived of it, and at the same time that man was not made in order that he might observe a day of absolute inactivity but that he might use it for his highest advantage. What we are dealing with now, however, is the relation of the law to Sabbath observance. And my conviction is that the law has no right to intervene except for the preservation to every man, as far as possible, of the Sabbath day as a day of rest. And this can be done mainly by the law causing the machinery of labour in all its forms, without exception, to stop, to be at rest, except where necessity intervenes. And it is at this point that the difficulty presents itself, the point at which a specific necessity may be held to prevail against the general rule.

As to the law undertaking to prescribe how I shall occupy my time on that day, whether I shall read or sleep, walk or lie down, go to church or remain at home, I should resist the enactment of any such legislation. The public has no right to interfere except for the preservation of the rights, and the furtherance of the well being of the people.

Now, as I have said, it may be a difficult thing to adjust this line, and I for one am in favor of a liberal interpretation of the rights of the individual; but when we come to the protection of society, to the preservation of the rights of the people from selfishness and greed, to prevent the flagrant violation of the peace and quiet of the day by individuals or corporations, and when we ask for plain, simple legislation, for a statement of the rights of society, which shall not be interfered with or violated, when we ask for a declaration in unequivocal language, we find at once that there is a hidden power that certainly does not "make for Righteousness," making its presence felt; a power which paralyzes

the hand of justice, and makes a farce of judgment; a power of malign intent and sinister design, which controls legislatures and makes their movements monuments of helplessness and fear.

Under our constitution questions of this kind are bandied about, cast from the province to the Dominion and from the Dominion to the province; and all the while the aggressive and greedy selfishness of men is advancing upon the domain of the rights of the people to a quiet day of rest and peaceful enjoyment.

Does it not reveal some fatuous influence of tremendous power to note, that whereas the conflict between the federal and the provincial legislatures for jurisdiction over other things has been sharp and embittered, each striving most strenuously and determinedly to maintain the jurisdiction as against the other, provinces arrayed against the Dominion, and the Dominion against the provinces; each defiant and aggressive, when we come to the domain of responsibility as against the influences which are the potent and flagrant causes of crime and vice we find a complete reversal of policy and judgment. The provincial legislatures asserting that they have no power whatever to deal with the matter, that it is beyond their domain and must be referred to the Dominion authorities. While the Dominion, which has been pressing so determinedly upon the provinces and asserting its rights as against theirs, all at once has become conscious of a limit of its authority in favor of the provinces. So that putting the two together we have a confession of complete helplessness.

There seems to be no power in our legislative system which has authority to deal with Sabbath desecration. Can any one explain this strange spectacle? This unlike energy and determination in the conflict between federal jurisdiction and provincial rights where money and territorial rights are concerned, and this inordinate self-abnegation and respect for one another's jurisdiction where the guardianship of something far more sacred is concerned?

II. The second instance of public or national sin is intemperance. With regard to this vice much of what I have said is strictly applicable. The magnitude of the evil is confirmed and deplored, the difficulty is to get any satisfactory method of restraining or removing it. I am not going to say anything of this however, at this time. All that is necessary for our purpose is to assume that legislation and law must have some responsibility in regard to the protection of the people from the ruin and misery of this monstrous curse. Whether it be by a law prohibiting the manufacture and sale of otherwise. But here we meet, and in an intensely aggravated form the same power, the same malign and I might say devilish influence seeking to prevent fair open discussion and thwarting every effort to arrive at effective means of protection. The cry of widows and orphans, of mothers and wives and sisters, and the indignant demand of resolute men that we be permitted to deal freely with this horrid, blasting curse, this hideous enslavement and destruction of our young manhood. All these are as waves beating helplessly and helplessly around the grim walls. We stretch out our hands, we feel an iron door, barred and bolted, and we are denied an entrance—public men appear to be under a spell. Their words are fair, and promises of honest consideration are readily given, but when the question comes to an issue these promises are snapped as thread in the flame. And once more it becomes evident that a hidden hand has been stretched forth. Strong men have been unmanned. A word has been whispered in their ears, and they have become clay in the potter's hands. The grip of the power which holds their destiny has been tightened, and once more there is vasillation and failure. Now, let me speak plainly here. It is not because men hold different views as to how best to deal with an acknowledged evil of monstrous proportions that I object. It is because, under the pretence of freedom and manly independence we find a weakness and a bondage which men try in vain to conceal. It is the appearance in another form of the permanent power which is doing so much to pervert justice and to turn manhood into a farce. It is of this that I speak. A power which finds the continuance of intemperance as of Sabbath desecration serviceable to its evil purpose; a power which knows well how to hide its real nature and clothe itself in the garments of unselfishness and lofty pretensions.

III. We come now to the third and last illustration, and this is set before us in the revelations of dishonesty in certain departments of public service, and of this let me say that while different from either of the others, it is but the last and most complete exposure of the evil of which I have spoken in connection with the two former questions. I have not been speaking of Sabbath desecration or intemperance in themselves, but as questions with which it seemed almost impossible to deal an account of a malign influence which prevented any fair open dealing with them on their merits. In this last we have come upon the evil itself. It stands revealed before us in all its deformity and uncleanness. As that which poisons and degrades so much of life. As to our consideration of a question of a so-called political character, I have very little to say. I know nothing of political parties as such in this matter and say nothing here of their different views of policy, but the suggestion that a minister of the gospel is to be silent on a great question of public morality such as this now is confessedly become, is one which deserves a more severe rebuke if possible than the shame which it seeks to conceal. "But why have you not spoken sooner?" or "why have you not waited till the close of the investigation having waited so long?" Because it is not right to give credence to reports and to speak of them as I speak here tonight so long as there is any possibility of error or exaggeration. Any possibility that the affair might be a species of blackmail or of a partisan attack, and on the other hand it would be equally far from what I conceive to be my duty at the present time to wait for the decision of the committee or the house. My object, my duty, as I feel it, is not to pronounce upon individuals, to cast stones upon those who may be condemned. I want to get deeper down than this; let those who are guilty be condemned and fitly punished, but while we do this, let us not forget in the cry "Turn them out," or "Keep them

in," that when the guilty are discovered and condemned we are only at the beginning of our duty in this affair. There are several questions to be considered here. Who are guilty? What have they done? And, most important of all What has caused this sad and shameful condition of affairs which is being revealed day by day in the committee room at Ottawa? It is very well to have the cancer removed at once by a skillful surgeon and keen blade, and you pray that another may not come in its place; but when the body is like the man full of leprosy, when there is no soundness in it, but from the crown of the head to the sole of the feet it is wounds and bruises and putrifying sores. You want new life, cleansing of the blood. You must reach the source of the malady. Now it is impossible to believe that all those who have been proven guilty, who have confessed their guilt were dishonest men to begin with. How have they become so? What a painful spectacle an old man with white hair, a man of character and standing, highly respected, of honorable name, bowed in his misery crying, "My God, that this should have come to me." Now it is not to take part in the condemnation of these men that I speak, but to inquire into the cause, the source of this temptation before which they have fallen.

It may be said, "The evil was in those men who laid the temptations in the way of the officials." That is true, but why were such men attracted to Ottawa and in such numbers?

Our Lord said, "Whosoever the carcass is there will the eagles be gathered together." Sometimes you can see a line of carrion birds in the air flying to and fro over the woods, and you know that yonder, far away in the dense forest, is a carcass which they have discovered, and over which they are holding quarrelsome and noisy revel. The taint upon the air attracted them unerringly. Now this is what suggests itself to us with painful distinctness as we read the accounts from papers of all parties. These birds of prey have confessedly been holding high carnival at Ottawa, and though it would be wrong to hold those with whom they were dealing as of the same character, or to hold as true all that has been offered in evidence, still the fact remains and is only strengthened by the investigation that these men came there, and the question remains, what attracted them? For years they have been familiar figures at the capital. Undoubtedly they had full confidence in the power of money, and they bestowed it with unstinted liberality. Who taught them. How did they learn the way? What taint upon the air floating from the departmental offices, upon the banks of the Ottawa, north and south and east and west to tell them of the prey?

Plenty of money to be expended—yes; but surely stern, cleanhanded integrity would have discouraged them in time, whereas they have been becoming bolder and bolder in their advances, till the flapping wings and rending talons were beyond concealment.

Now the saddest thing to me in all this is that I am not surprised. If I should say that I am I should not be speaking the truth. I do not mean to say that I was prepared to hear guilt charged against any of these men or any one else, but I cannot say I am surprised to hear of such things. Nay I will say more. I will ask, are you surprised? Is any one surprised? On what grounds is he surprised? Have we not known that money in tens of thousands had been spent in elections. That bribing has become a thing of common occurrence. That men hold out their hands for the price of their manhood in the streets. And are we astonished and shocked when we discover where the money came from? Or how it came? But on the other hand men, wonder why the public conscience is not shocked more profoundly, why people seem to accept it as only a trifling affair, many of them. No wonder at all; they are quite accustomed to the idea of money in connection with politics. No man can pretend to say that there is any more certainty now that vast sums were spent in debauching the electors than there was before this investigation was begun.

And now, we come to the revelation in all its naked and hideous deformity of that justice perverting, soul-enslaving power which becomes the ally of whatever is of evil consequence, and the enemy of true manhood and moral integrity.

Covetousness.

The love of gain. One said long ago, "every man has his price" and he might as well go from end to end of our fair dominion and utter his slander unchallenged today.

"What will you give me" is the cry. Advanced position means a higher value for your political service, and the constituency as a whole is held at a price some public favor to be bestowed, not as a right as a national benefit but as a bribe for the return of supporters or opponents of some political party. Any man who is exclaiming in well feigned horror at the revelations, would be silenced if the test put to the accusers of the woman taken in adultery were applied to them—"Let him that is without sin among you cast the first stone." Many who can almost make themselves believe that they are shocked at the thought of such iniquity, have received the price of their honor at elections held not long ago. Men who have sold their manhood in the shambles have been horrified as they read of these revelations, and cry as if tens of thousands of dollars were needed for the proper and necessary expenses of an election in any constituency, or as if this money could have come from nowhere. My brethren, believe we need to do something more than get at the guilt or innocence of certain individuals. This vile thing must be put away from us. And the remedy is in your own hands. A prominent temperance man once called on the late Sir John Macdonald and asked him when we should have a prohibitory law. "Whenever you want it," said Sir John. "We want it now." "Well, say so," was the response. "We say so now." "Well, send you to parliament who will represent you," replied the premier. And this is the sum of the whole matter. The parliament and the government are what the people make them. And the people make them what they themselves are. But the worst feature of all is that the conscience of the people seems to have been scared. The moral sense is blunted. How

can men who have accepted money for their votes expect their representatives to decline larger bribes when opportunity presents itself? This would be unreasonable. It is right and necessary that there be no filtering or concealment in this matter. Let guilt in high or low be exposed fearlessly and punished—punished so that the example will be remembered, but, believe me, no such process will reach the real source of the disease until the people rise in the name of God and purge themselves, breaking the chain which has enslaved and degraded them, and elect men of pure and honorable character to represent their clean conscience and pure manhood in the councils of the land.

There is no fairer land than ours. The sun did not shine today upon a more highly favored country than Canada. And her life is young, taking its form and mould and character readily. What a sad thing that this wrench should have been given to the foundation beams. But there is a strong true manhood to be roused, in the house and in the country. Let us call upon God and in the name of Christ, our Captain, let us put the evil away from us. Let us know more and more of that righteousness which exalteth a nation and less of the sin which is a reproach to any people.

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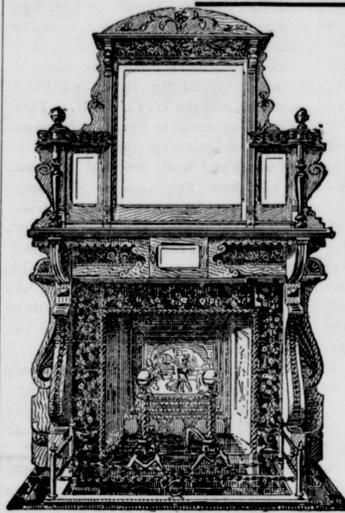
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