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PLAGUES OF THE CITIES.

THE IDLE RICH, THE IDLE POOR, THE
DESPERATE, DANGEROUS POOR.

Dr. Talmage's Graphic Sketch of the Dangerous Elements in City Life—Life in the Jails, Cellars and Hospitals—The Lava Seething Below.

NEW YORK, April 12.—Dr. Talmage, in continuance of the course of sermons on "The Ten Plagues of the Cities," today preached to large audiences in the Brooklyn Academy of Music in the forenoon and at The Christian Herald service at the New York Academy of Music in the evening on "The Plague of Crime." He took for his text Exodus vii, 20, "All the waters that were in the river were turned to blood."

Among all the Egyptian plagues none could have been worse than this. The Nile is the wealth of Egypt. Its fish, its food, its waters, the irrigation of garden and fields. Its condition decides the prosperity or the doom of the empire. What happens to the Nile happens to all Egypt. And now in the text that great river is incarnadined. It is a red gash across an empire. In poetic license we speak of wars which turn the rivers into blood. But my text is not a poetic license. It was a fact, a great crimson, appalling condition described. The Nile rolling deep of blood! Can you imagine a more awful plague?

The modern plague which nearest corresponds with that is the plague of crime in all our cities. It halts not for bloodshed. It shrinks from no carnage. It bruises and cuts and strikes down and destroys. It revels in the blood of body and soul—this plague of crime, rampant for ages, and never bolder or more rampant than now.

HORRORS OF THE POLICE COURTS.

The annual police reports of these cities as I examine them are to me more suggestive than Dante's Inferno, and all Christian people as well as reformers need to awaken to a present and tremendous duty. If you want this "Plague of Crime" to stop there are several kinds of persons you need to consider. First, the public criminals. You ought not to be surprised that these people make up a large portion in many communities. The vast majority of the criminals who take ship from Europe come into our own port. In 1889, of the forty-nine thousand people who were incarcerated in the prisons of the country thirty-two thousand were of foreign birth. Many of them were the very desperadoes of society, waiting for an opportunity to riot and steal and debauch, joining the large gang of American thugs and cutthroats.

There are in this cluster of cities—New York, Jersey City and Brooklyn—four thousand people whose entire business in life is to commit crime. That is as much their business as jurisprudence or medicine or merchandise is your business. To it they bring all their energies of body, mind and soul, and they look upon the intervals which they spend in prison as so much unfortunate loss of time, just as you look upon an attack of influenza or rheumatism which fastens you in the house for a few days. It is their lifetime business to pick pockets and blow up safes and shoplift and ply the panel game, and they have as much pride of skill in their business as you have in yours when you upset the argument of an opposing counsel or cure a gunshot fracture which other surgeons have given up, or foresee a turn in the market as you buy goods just before they go up 20 per cent. It is their business to commit crime, and I do not suppose that once in a year they thought of the immortality of their crimes.

Added to these professional criminals, American and foreign, there is a large class of men who are more or less industrious in crime. In one year the police in this cluster of cities arrested ten thousand people for theft and ten thousand for assault and battery and fifty thousand for intoxication. Drunkenness is responsible for much of the theft, since it confuses a man's ideas of property, and he gets his hands on things that do not belong to him. Rum is responsible for much of the assault and battery, inspiring men to sudden bravery, which they must demonstrate, though it be on the face of the next gentleman.

Ten million dollars' worth of property stolen in this cluster of cities in one year. You cannot, as good citizens, be independent of that fact. It will touch your pocket, since I have to give you the fact that these three cities pay about eight million dollars' worth of taxes a year to arraign, try and support the criminal population. You help to pay the board of every criminal, from the meek thief that snatches a spoon of cotton up to some man who swamps a bark. More than that, it touches your heart in the moral depression of the community. You might as well think to stand in a closely confined room where there are fifty people and yet not breathe the vitiated air as to stand in a community where there is such a great multitude of the depraved without somewhat being contaminated. What is the fire that burns your store down compared with the conflagration which consumes your morals? What is the theft of the gold and silver from your money safe compared with the theft of your children's virtue?

CAN THE CRIMINAL BE REFORMED?

We are all ready to arraign criminals. We shout at the top of our voices, "Stop thief!" and when the police get on the track we come out, hatless and in our slippers, and assist

in the arrest. We come around the bawling ruffian and hustle him off to justice, and when he gets in prison what do we do for him? With great gusto we put on the handcuffs and the hoppers; but what preparation are we making for the day when the handcuffs and the hoppers come off? Society seems to say to these criminals, "Villain, go in there and rot," when it ought to say, "You are an offender against the law, but we mean to give you an opportunity to repent; we mean to help you. Here are Bibles and tracts and Christian influences. Christ died for you. Look, and live."

Vast improvements have been made by introducing industries into the prison, but we want something more than hammers and shoe lasts to reclaim these people. Aye, we want more than sermons on the Sabbath day. Society must impress these men with the fact that it does not enjoy their suffering, and that it is attempting to reform and elevate them. The majority of criminals suppose that society has a grudge against them, and they in turn have a grudge against society.

They are harder in heart and more infuriated when they come out of jail than when they went in. Many of the people who go to prison go again and again. Some years ago, of fifteen hundred prisoners who during the year had been in Sing Sing four hundred had been there before. In a house of correction in the country, where during a certain reach of time there had been five thousand people, more than three thousand had been there before. So, in one case the prison and in the other case the house of correction left them just as bad as they were before.

The secretary of one of the benevolent societies of New York says a lad of fifteen years of age had spent three years of his life in prison, and he said to the lad, "What have they done for you to make you better?" "Well," replied the lad, "the first time I was brought up before the judge he said, 'You ought to be ashamed of yourself.' And then I committed a crime again, and I was brought up before the same judge, and he said, 'You rascal!' And after a while I committed some other crime, and I was brought before the same judge, and he said, 'You ought to be hanged.' That is all they had done for me in the way of reformation and salvation." "Oh," you say, "these people are incorrigible." I suppose there are hundreds of persons this day lying in the prison bunks who would leap up at the prospect of reformation if society would only allow them a way into decency and respectability. "Oh," you say, "I have no patience with these rogues." I ask you in reply, how much better would you have been under the same circumstances?

Suppose your mother had been a blasphemer and your father a sot, and you had started life with a body stuffed with evil proclivities, and you had spent much of your time in a cellar amid obscenities and cursings, and if at ten years of age you had been compelled to go out and steal, battered and banged at night if you came in without any spoils, and suppose your early manhood and womanhood had been covered with rags and filth, and decent society had turned its back upon you and left you to consort with vagabonds and wharf rats—how much better would you have been? I have no sympathy with that executive clemency which would let crime run loose, or which would sit in the gallery of a court room weeping because some hard hearted wretch is brought to justice; but I do say that the safety and life of the community demand more potential influences in behalf of public offenders.

POULSNESS OF PRISON LIFE.

In some of the city prisons the air is like that of the Black Hole of Calcutta. I have visited prisons where, as the air swept through the wicket, it almost knocked me down. No sunlight. Young men who had committed their first crime crowded in among old offenders. I saw in one prison a woman, with a child almost blind, who had been arrested for the crime of poverty, who was waiting until the low law could take her to the almshouse, where she rightfully belonged; but she was thrust in there with her child amid the most abandoned wretches of the town. Many of the offenders in that prison slept on the floor, with nothing but a vermin covered blanket over them. Those people crowded and wan and wasted and half suffocated and infuriated. I said to the men, "How do you stand it here?" "God knows," said one man, "we have to stand it." Oh, they will pay you when they get out. Where they burned down one house they will burn three. They will strike deeper the assassin's knife. They are the subtle plotting worse burglars.

Some of the city jails are the best places I know of to manufacture foot-pads, vagabonds and cutthroats. Yale college is not so well calculated to make scholars, nor Harvard so well calculated to make scientists, nor Princeton so well calculated to make theologians as many of our jails are calculated to make criminals. All that those men do not know of crime after they have been in that dungeon for some time Satan's machination cannot teach them. In the insufferable stench and sickening surroundings of such places there is nothing but disease for the body, misery for the mind and death for the soul. Stilled air and darkness and vermin never turned a thief into an honest man.

We want men like John Howard and Sir William Blackstone and women like Elizabeth Fry to do for the prisoners of the United States what those people did in other days for the prisoners

of England. I thank God for what Isaac T. Hopper and Dr. Wines and Mr. Harris and scores of others have done in the way of prison reform; but we want something more radical before we will come the blessing of him who said, "I was in prison, and ye came unto me."

Again, in your effort to arrest this plague of crime you need to consider untrustworthy officials. "Woe unto thee, O land, when thy king is a child and thy princes drink in the morning." It is a great calamity to a city when bad men get into public authority. Why was it that in New York there was such unparalleled crime between 1866 and 1871? It was because the judges of police in that city at that time, for the most part, were as corrupt as the vagabonds that came before them for trial. Those were the days of high carnival for election frauds, assassination and forgery. We had all kinds of rings. There was one man during those years that got one hundred and twenty-eight thousand dollars in one year for serving the public. In a few years it was estimated that there were fifty millions of public treasure squandered. In those times the criminal had only to wink at the judge, or his lawyer would wink for him, and the question was decided for the defendant.

Of the eight thousand people arrested in that city in one year only three thousand were punished. These little matters were "fired up," while the interests of society were "fired down." You know as well as I do that one villain who escapes only opens the door for other criminals. When the two pickpockets snatched the diamond pin from the Brooklyn gentleman in a Broadway stage, and the villains were arrested, and the trial was set down for the general sessions, and then the trial never came, and never anything more was heard of the case, the public officials were only biding higher for more crime.

WHEN THE WICKED RULE THE PEOPLE MOURN.

It is no complaint to public authority when we have in all the cities of the country, walking abroad, men and women notorious for criminality unwhipped of justice. They are pointed out to you in the street day by day. There you find what are called the "fenecs," the men who stand between the thief and the honest man, sheltering the thief and at a great price handing over the goods to the owner to whom they belong. There you will find those who are called the "skinners," the men who hover around Wall street, with great sleight of hand in bonds and stocks. There you will find the funeral thieves, the people who go and sit down and mourn with families and pick their pockets. And there you find the "confidence men," who borrow money of you because they have a dead child in the house and want to bury it, when they never had a house or a family; or they want to go to England and get a large property there, and they want you to pay their way, and they will send the money back by the very next mail.

There are the "harbor thieves," the "shoplifters," the "pickpockets," famous all over the cities. Hundreds of them with their faces in the "rogue's gallery," yet doing nothing for the last five or ten years but defraud society and escape justice. When these people go unarrested and unpunished, it is putting a high premium upon vice and saying to the young criminals of this country, "What a safe thing it is to be a great criminal!" Let the law sweep upon them. Let it be known in this country that crime will have no quarter, that the detectives are after it, that the police club is being brandished, that the iron door of the prison is being opened, that the judge is ready to call on the case. Too great leniency to criminals is too great severity to society.

Again, in your effort to arrest this plague of crime you need to consider the idle population. Of course I do not refer to people who are getting old, or to the sick or to those who cannot get work, but I tell you to look out for those athletic men and women who will not work. When the French nobleman was asked why he kept busy when he had so large a property he said, "I keep on engraving so I may not hang myself." I do not care who the man is, you cannot afford to be idle. It is from the idle classes that the criminal classes are made up. Character, like water, gets putrid if it stands still too long. Who can wonder that in this world, where there is so much to do, and all the hosts of earth and heaven and hell are plunging into the conflict, and angels are flying and God is at work, and the universe is a-quake with the marching and countermarching, that God lets his indignation fall upon a man who chooses idleness?

I have watched these do-nothings who spend their time stroking their beard, and retouching their toilet, and criticizing industrious people, and pass their days and nights in barrooms and club houses, lounging and smoking and chewing and card playing. They are not only useless, but they are dangerous. How hard it is for them to while away the hours! Alas for them! If they do not know how to while away an hour, what will they do when they have all eternity on their hands? These men for awhile smoke the best cigars, and wear the best clothes, and move in the highest spheres, but I have noticed that very soon they come down to the prison, the almshouse, or stop at the gallows.

INVINCIBLE LAZINESS.

The police stations of this cluster of

cities furnish annually between two and three hundred thousand lodgings. For the most part, these two and three hundred thousand lodgings are furnished to able bodied men and women—people as able to work as you and I are. When they are received no longer at one police station, because they are "repeaters," they go to some other station, and so they keep moving around. They get their food at house doors, stealing what they can lay their hands on in the front basement while the servant is spreading the bread in the back basement. They will not work. Time and again, in the country districts, they have wanted hundreds and thousands of laborers. These men will not go. They do not want to work. I have tried them. I have set them to sawing wood in my cellar to see whether they wanted to work. I offered to pay them well for it. I have heard the saw going for about three minutes, and then I went down, and lo, the wood, but no saw! They are the pest of society, and they stand in the way of the Lord's poor, who ought to be helped, and must be helped, and will be helped.

While there are thousands of industrious men who cannot get any work, these men who do not want any work come in and make that plea. I am in favor of the restoration of the old fashioned whipping post for just this one class of men who will not work, sleeping at night at public expense in the station house, during the day getting their food at your doorstep. Imprisonment does not scare them. They would like it. Blackwell's Island or Sing Sing would be a comfortable home for them. They would have no objection to the almshouse, for they like thin soup, if they cannot get mock turtle. I propose this for them: On one side of them put some healthy work; on the other side put a rawhide, and let them take their choice. I like for that class of people the scant bill of fare that Paul wrote out for the Thessalonian loafers, "If any work not, neither should he eat." By what law of God or man is it right that you and I should toil day in and day out, until our hands are blistered, and our arms ache and our brain gets numb, and then be called upon to support what in the United States are about two million loafers? They are a very dangerous class. Let the public authorities keep their eyes on them.

Again, among the uprooting classes I place the oppressed poor. Poverty to a certain extent is chastening; but after that, when it drives a man to the wall, and he hears his children cry in vain for bread, it sometimes makes him desperate. I think that there are thousands of honest men lacerated into vagabondism. There are men crushed under burdens for which they are not half paid. While there is no excuse for criminality, even in oppression, I state it as a simple fact that much of the scoundrelism of the community is consequent upon ill treatment. There are many men and women battered and bruised and stung until the hour of despair has come, and they stand with the ferocity of a wild beast which, pursued until it can run no longer, turns round, foaming and bleeding, to fight the hounds.

LIFE IN THE CELLARS.

There is a vast underground New York and Brooklyn life that is appalling and shameful. It wallows and steams with putrefaction. You go down the stairs, which are wet and decayed with filth, and at the bottom you find the poor victims on the floor, cold, sick, three-fourths dead, sinking into a still darker corner under the gleam of the lantern of the police. There has not been a breath of fresh air in that room for five years, literally. The broken sewer empties its contents upon them, and they lie at night in the swimming filth. There they are, men, women, children; blacks, whites; Mary Magdalene without her repentance and Lazarus without his God. These are the "dives" into which the pickpockets and the thieves go, as well as a great many who would like a different life but cannot get it. These places are the sores of the city, which bleed perpetual corruption.

They are the underlying volcano that threatens us with a Caracacas earthquake. It rolls and roars and surges and heaves and rocks and blasphemes and dies. And there are only two outlets for it—the police court and the Potter's field. In other words, they must either go to prison or to hell. Oh, you never saw it, you say. You never will see it until on the day when those staggering wretches shall come up in the light of the judgment throne, and while all hearts are being revealed, God will ask you what you did to help them.

There is another layer of poverty and destitution, not so squalid, but almost as helpless. You hear the incessant wailing for bread and clothes and fire. Their eyes are sunken. Their cheek bones stand out. Their hands are damp with slow consumption. Their flesh is pulled up with drooples. Their breath is like that of the charnel house. They hear the roar of the wheels of fashion overhead, and the gay laughter of men and maidens, and wonder why God gave to others so much and to them so little. Some of them thrust into an infidelity like that of the poor German girl who, when told in the midst of her wretchedness that God was good, said, "No, no good God. Just look at me. No good God."

In this cluster of cities, whose cry of want I interpret, there are said to be as far as I can figure it up from reports—about three hundred thousand honest poor who are dependent upon individ-

ual, city and state charities. If all their voices could come up at once it would be a groan that would shake the foundations of the city, and bring all earth and heaven to the rescue. But, for the most part, it suffers unexpressed. It sits in silence, gnashing its teeth and sucking the blood of its own arteries, waiting for the judgment day.

Oh, I should not wonder if on that day it would be found out that some of us had some things that belonged to them; some extra garments which might have made them comfortable in cold days; some bread thrust into the ash barrel that might have appeased their hunger for a little while; some wasted candle or gas jet that might have kindled up their darkness; some fresco on the ceiling that would have given them a roof; some jewel which, brought to that orphan girl in time, might have kept her from being crowded off the precipices of an unclean life; some New Testament that would have told them of him who "came to seek and save that which was lost."

Oh, this wave of vagrancy and hunger and nakedness that dashes against our front doorstep! If the roofs of all the houses of destitution could be lifted so we could look down into them, just as God looks, whose nerves would be strong enough to stand it? And yet there they are. The fifty thousand sewing women in these three cities, some of them in hunger and cold, working night after night, until sometimes the blood spurts from nostril and lips.

How well their grief was voiced by that despairing woman who stood by her invalid husband and invalid child, and said to the city missionary, "I am downhearted. Everything's against us; and then there are other things." "What other things?" said the city missionary. "Oh," she replied, "my sin." "What do you mean by that?" "Well," she said, "I never hear or see anything good. It's work from Monday morning till Saturday night, and then when Sunday comes I can't go out, and I walk the floor, and it makes me tremble to think that I have got to meet God. Oh, sir, it's so hard for us. We have to work so, and then we have so much trouble, and then we are getting along so poorly; and see this wee little thing growing weaker and weaker; and then to think we are not getting nearer to God, but floating away from him. Oh, sir, I do wish I was ready to die."

DUTY OF CHURCH AND SOCIETY.

I should not wonder if they had a good deal better time than we in the future, to make up for the fact that they had such a bad time here. It would be just like Jesus to say, "Come up and take the highest seats. You suffered with me on earth; now be glorified with me in heaven." O thou weeping One of Bethany! O thou dying One of the cross! Have mercy on these starving, freezing, homeless poor of these great cities!

I have preached this sermon for four or five practical reasons: Because I want you to know who are the uprooting classes of society. Because I want you to be more discriminating in your charities. Because I want your hearts open with generosity and your hands open with charity. Because I want you to be made the sworn friends of all city evangelization, and all newsboys' lodging houses, and all children's aid societies and Dorcas societies, under the skillful manipulation of wives and mothers and sisters and daughters. Let the spare garments of your wardrobe be fitted to the limbs of the wan and shivering. I should not wonder if that hat that you give should come back a jeweled coronet, or if that garment that you hand out from your wardrobe should mysteriously be whitened and somehow wrought into the Saviour's own robe, so in the last day he would run his hand over it and say, "I was naked, and ye clothed me." That would be putting your garments to glorious uses.

But more than that, I have preached the sermon because I thought in the contrast you would see how very kindly God had dealt with you, and I thought that thousands of you would go to your comfortable homes and sit at your well filled tables and at the warm registers, and look at the round faces of your children, and that then you would burst into tears at the review of God's goodness to you, and that you would go to your room and lock the door and kneel down and say: "O Lord, I have been an ingrate; make me thy child. O Lord, there are so many hungry and unclad and unsheltered today; I thank thee that all my life thou hast taken such good care of me. O Lord, there are so many sick and crippled children today; I thank thee mine are well, some of them on earth, some of them in heaven. Thy goodness, O Lord, breaks me down. Take me once and forever. Sprinkled as I was many years ago at the altar, while my mother held me, now I consecrate my soul to thee in a holier baptism of repenting tears."

"For sinners, Lord, thou can't be bleed, And I'm a sinner vile indeed; Lord, I believe thy grace is free, Oh, magnify that grace to me."

Gross Carelessness.
Miss Broozy—That statue you made for us, Mr. Graver?

Graver—Oh, yes—the copy of the Venus of Milo; do you like it?

Miss Broozy—Yes, but isn't it unlucky?—its arms have somehow been broken off.—Munsey's Weekly.

How to Obtain Credit.
"I wonder what I must do to appear rich?"

"Quite simple; drop a threepenny bit on the floor and don't stoop to pick it up."—De Solbreusness.

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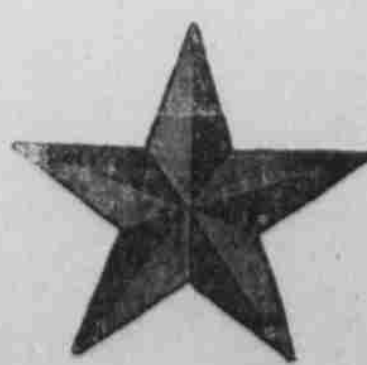
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