

THE CHURCH A POWER IN GREAT CITIES.

A Discourse Delivered in Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church, by the Pasor, Rev. H. H. Sadal, D. D.

"Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman shall be in vain."—Psalm cxviii, 1.

The writer, in this Psalm, states the great truth that nothing is well done without the blessing of God; that the builder's skill needs the grace of the Divine touch, and the watchman the care of Him that never slumbereth nor sleepeth.

Of course it is not meant to assert that the visible presence of Deity, or in its stead an angel form, comes down and plies mallet, trowel, and plummet on the walls of the rising edifice, or that God interposes miraculously to protect the endangered city or country.

It is therefore plain that there must be an organization distinct from the political society called the State. From the nature of the case, the political society must, in some form or other, include the whole people, high and low, bad and good.

True, there is a sense in which Church and State ought to be united. The power of the Church—its spiritual power—ought to be so great as to spread like a latent fire—like a purifying breath—into the very heart and soul of every department of government.

We have already seen that political society is organized for general purposes; the Church must be a distinct organization, because it is organized for one purpose alone, around one sole idea, namely, virtue, that is, holiness, justice, benevolence, truth.

But then it belongs to the very idea of the Church that she ground her mission in behalf of virtue in religion. The Church, in the very kernel of its meaning, is not merely a society for the promotion of external morality; it is, as we have already said, a divine society.

Whenever religion is ignored morality becomes mere convenience, to be used or dropped as profit or passion may chance to dictate. The loftiest intellectual culture cannot save our virtue from the ill effects of a shallow theory of morality.

In this current of thought we find the reason, the profound philosophy, of the Church's course

in having schools and colleges under her care. Her enlightened leaders know that learning, left to the hands of mere scientific and literary instructors, gives a top-sidled and highly dangerous development.

It demonstrated that a godless and conscienceless intellect, highly reared by art and letters, will always lit its possessors as much above the savage in wickedness as in culture.

It is to find on a desolate island a splendid palace, and then to insist that it was not intended to be occupied, and that nobody built or planned it.

It is the great evil of our system of public school instruction, valuable as it is on the whole. We hold, and rightly, that all the children of the people should have an English education.

The Church, then, is an organization for the specific purposes of moral and spiritual renovation; virtue is its great aim, and religion is its mission.

But we must remember that if the Church organizes with special power in a large city, so does its great enemy. I am not aware that men have ever organized themselves specifically to promote sin, as sin; and yet they have often united for purposes manifestly sinful.

What is the object of the high seas of robbers and burglars on the land? What is a brothel, with its proprietor reducing crime to rule? What is a house of liquor sellers, such as exist in New York, with its officers, its toll-treasurer, and its regular meetings to prevent legislation in favor of temperance, and to keep open the flood-gates of dissipation? What are all these but sin becoming organic?

Now, let us examine and see whether or not the Church is the power that antagonizes this fearful amount of evil in the city. Does the Church prevent the complete domination of the streets by vice? What has she done, and what she now doing? Recall the fact, then, that in this city there are several hundred church edifices, and as many Sunday Schools, in all of which the moral law is recognized and enforced by divine sanctions every Sabbath.

In a word, the Church in the city, great in wealth, and in the number of its members, commanding in influence, with its vast benevolences, its great erudition, its splendid and numerous church edifices, its vast responsibility, must hold on for dear life to the precious truth, must push on the Kingdom of God, must cover every block of the city with its missionary labors, must dot it all over with Sunday Schools, must strewn tracts and good books over its whole surface, must keep vigilant and alert over the press, both in regard to books and periodicals, must project

its power into schools, must lay its influence upon Mayor and Councils, must diminish poverty, and having a common Christian end towards which to labor, and for which to sacrifice, having all this Christian breadth, and this sacred boldness, will soon begin to see the abuses and crimes about them giving way, and the city giving into a model of order, sobriety, and justice.

Suppose it to be possible, for example, that you should wake up some bright Sunday morning, and find every church edifice removed, and a theatre built in its stead. And suppose these were the end of the churches; no more were to be built; the Sabbath gone, its peculiarities lost in the din of business and pleasure; the various religious societies, the Sunday School, Tract, and Bible Societies, all extinct; the Church and all its ideas things of the past.

But as great a power for good as the Church already is among us, casting her holy shadow even in the face of the most brazen sin, and lighting the way for the good, she is bound to become a still greater power. In order to this, one of the first things to be done by her is to become broader, not latitudinarian, in doctrine, to include in her arms all who are in need of the precious doctrines of religious experience, and not enjoying them a whit less than formerly, we must grasp at the whole city.

As to the idea of respectability in the Church, it is a sad illustration of the extent to which the respectability of the Church has fallen, when we begin to discuss the different grades of respectability among the wretched objects of our charity.

When she sees the drinking-houses and other establishments open on Sunday, in defiance of the plain letter of the law, and under the sanction of the highest police, municipal, and sectarian divisions, and make a loud, united, and irresistible demand for the cessation of such wickedness.

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