

WANT OF MORAL PRINCIPLE AMONG MEN IN POSITIONS OF TRUST AND POWER.

A Sermon by Rev. J. H. Bayless, at Roberts' Park Chapel, Indianapolis Ind., Sabbath Evening, Jan. 14.

[CONTINUED.]

PROVERBS xvi. 12: "It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness; for the throne is established by righteousness."

Then there are thousands more in the same social rank who are simply glazed into respectability; they have neither intelligence nor moral principle; they are shallow and unreliable; they are people who would be excluded with utter contempt but for the fact that they live in luxury and can make a show. Money is almost absolutely certain as a means of admission to high life. It brings within reach a luxurious style of life, ease, amusement, travel, elaborate dress, every thing which strikes the sense. It is often the only passport to high position. Political campaigns are frequently determined, not by the comparative merit of the candidate, but by the expenditure of money, and so it often happens that a man who is too high principled to bribe men into his service is beaten by one who has no such scruples, and thus we come to be dominated by the worst of the two—by an officer who, because he has put money into the campaign, must get money out of his office to make himself good.

But beyond all this, money gives power, and the power is in some proportion to the money. It gives weight to opinions and emphasis to words. And it is just at this point that these stupendous frauds find their stimulus. What does any man want with twenty or thirty millions of property? One million opens to him every avenue of ease and luxury for which any proper aspiration can be entertained. He can travel the wide world over and go in state constantly; he can supply every real and fancied want. Why desire nineteen millions more? Why, especially, brook the ignominy of possible exposure by attempting to get these nineteen additional millions by fraud? The only explanation I can think of is the lust of power. A man who has such unlimited means of wealth, and who is thus destitute of moral principle, knows that he can bind men to him by the thousand. He can rule a city; buy up its Council; bribe a legislature; he is a very Colossus among his fellows; the magnates of the government come humbly to his feet. A man who steals a second-hand coat from some plunder-shop is chased by the police, and shut up to fight vermin in some filthy jail; the starving boy who steals a loaf of bread is hurried off to the house of correction, or the Bridewell; but when a man uses the opportunities of high official position to steal ten millions, we are almost overawed by his daring, the vastness of his plan, and his success, and he retains his office and defies the courts. There is scarce anything which gives a man more satisfaction than conscious power; and a man can easily see how one who is ambitious in this direction, and knows that money will give him power, should lay himself out to get it in this way.

Thus we have the aristocracy of money, a thing of emptiness and show, heartless and cold; yet full of power in certain directions, as it is of ostentation. Seeing this, every body wants money. The man who has nothing wants some; the man who has something wants more; the man who has ten thousand dollars wants fifty thousand; the man who has fifty thousand wants half a million; the man who has a million wants ten. The whole land is at fever heat a good deal of the time to amass fortunes. And to the fevered brains of these ambitious thousands the slow accumulations of honest industry give no promise. They must find some shorter road to fortune. Out of this comes the tide of speculation, which surges backward and forward over this land all the while, and which sometimes rises and overflows us like a veritable tidal wave. The risks taken by professional gamblers are almost infinitely less every day of the year than those taken by men on 'Change, who profess not to gamble at all. There is not a week in which we do not read of some huge manipulation of the market in some city, which is telegraphed through the country as a 'corner' or a 'bull' or 'bear' movement. And this is not confined to cities. Men in country towns and on farms are constant 'operators'; and many a man in the country 'does it on the sly' for fear his trade would suffer at home if his neighbors knew of the risks he was carrying.

Huge real estate speculations are inaugurated. The Legislature authorizes a tax upon a city to lay out parks; then the parks are located—not in the dense part of the population, where the city needs 'breathing holes'; where sore-eyed children need a sight of some green thing; and where handling thousands need the fragrance of flowers and fresh air—but away outside, where those who manage the thing own land; where parks are needed about as much as salt is needed in the ocean, or ice at the North Pole. The parks are called for on sanitary grounds, and then located on grounds of speculation.

But if the bill would stop with speculation, which has some show of honesty, it would be well. But it does not. A young man must 'put on style,' and in order to do it he robs his employer. He does not see that even social ostracism is better than dishonesty; he forgets that 'an honest man's the noblest work of God.' And perhaps he reasons in this way: 'Why should not I steal a little? There is Captain A., who went into the country department of the army a poor man, and came out with fifty thousand dollars, and has a good deal more influence in society now than before he robbed the government; and there is Alderman Q., who has managed somehow to get rich in a few years out of an office which, of itself, would not support him; and yet he is Alderman still, and does not seem to suffer much in the public mind; there is Senator D., who went to the Legislature in very moderate circumstances, stayed there one term, and has been building extensive blocks ever since; it is true they do whisper something about corruption in his case, but nothing has ever been done about it, and he stands well in the community.' I would not excuse the young man. He ought to go in rage, and suffer with hunger, rather than steal. But who is surprised if he reasons thus, and if he goes still further, and yields to the temptation which this line of argument so much favors? A pay-master in the army is seized with this ambition to be rich. He will not steal outright, but he will do what is morally equivalent to it—he will use some of the money which he controls to speculate in stocks. The speculation goes against him, and then he uses more of his trust funds to make in a second venture, enough to replace the first loss. He thinks of nothing else to do. He is ruined if he confesses his misappropriation of funds, and his failure in speculation. And so he makes the second venture, but he loses again. Thus he continues until his losses amount to half a million and he can escape no longer. He is exposed and ruined. But somebody was in the game at which he lost, and won the very amount which he lost. Has anybody a word of censure for the winner? Somebody may put in a feeble remonstrance, and say: 'Now, but who cares? As for the loser, perhaps the winner knew that the paymaster was using money which was not his own; knows that that half million which he won from the now defaulting and imprisoned officer is the property of the United States; knows it to be continued.

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