

The City of Unrighteousness.

By Rev. William Barry, D.D.

As I walked through the great wilderness, it chanced upon a day that I came to a city, the walls whereof seemed to reach unto Heaven; and its mighty gates stood open, but so thronged by a multitude pressing in between them that to make entrance was no easy thing. Yet I contrived to pass in with the crowd, and immediately I was aware of a murky and flaming sky overhead with the sound of roaring furnaces and resounding wheels, and all manner of machinery at work, in the tall houses which lined every street on both sides, while the men and women with me hurried onwards as in a flood to the main square of the city. A strange sight it was which met my eyes on arriving thither. Beneath clouds of rolling smoke, lighted up incessantly by the jets of chemical fires that the chimneys cast out, I beheld the crowd swaying to and fro, now surging to one side of the square, and now to the other, as distracted by contrary impulses. And as I looked more closely, I discerned on my right hand a huge statue, carved in darkest bronze, which rose high above the crowd on a golden pedestal. A figure, it seemed, of a Titan or giant, one of the mighty men of old, in the countenance an expression of pain, of striving, of unsatisfied desire, while the crooked talons grasped between them the globe of the earth, and the eyes bent downwards were absorbed as in steadfast calculation. To that anguish-stricken, strenuous symbol of a task for ever renewed and never accomplished, the multitude were lifting hands of prayer, cries and clamours of entreaty, in their eager struggle. Some had their hands upon their fellows' throats, and not a few were trampled down. Bewildered by so fierce and cruel a vision, I turned my eyes, as for relief, to the far-off side of that immense piazza, where the crowd kept shifting and moving like a sea which the storm is beating into foam. There, likewise, a figure stood enthroned, but how little resembling the Titan over against him! For this was a statue shaped of Parian marble, fair as some Greek God—a beautiful, dissipated young man it seemed, on whose features passed a rosy tinge, and in his hands a golden cup which he was lifting to his mouth for a draught. And here, too, men and women, young and old, kept up a litany of petition, as asking to share in the enchantments of the cup, from which, whenever a sparkle of the contents fell upon any of them, into their faces passed the expression of dreamy pleasure I had noted in the marble deity. But how they strove with one another. How hard was the light in their eyes! And under their feet lay many children beaten down, whom no man regarded. For the intoxication was universal; and ask as I might, it was vain to expect an answer from these worshippers, touching the object which they adored with such over-mastering passion.

ITS STRANGE FOUNDATIONS.

Then methought, in my perplexity I looked round for one who was sober, and a little apart I saw standing what seemed a venerable old man, robed in white down to his feet, and he was writing with an iron pen in the book which he held. His aspect was severe and awful, so that I could not bear to fix a steady gaze upon him. And I said, "O, my Lord, what is this city into which I have wandered, and how do men call the idols which here I see them worshipping?" He made answer after a while, not looking up from the pages wherein he still was writing. "The city that thou seest has many names, but in the Book of God it is styled Babylon the Great, which hath committed evil with all the kings of the earth, the golden city, the oppressor. And the dark Titan upon thy right

hand is Mammon, the god of gain; but the fair young man whose semblance thou beholdest in the marble is Belial, the god of selfish pleasure. Now, moreover, if thou wilt open thine eyes, thou mayest mark upon what foundations this Babylon is established." There-with I saw—a thing dreadful and unexpected—that the vast city had for its very basis whereon it was built thousands and tens of thousands of living and writhing bodies, all the slaves, and serfs and miserable hirelings of the world, who with their strength upheld it, while the continual murmur of their unheeded lamentations made music, as discordant as it was heartpiercing, like a chorus to the tumult and trappings above them. It was too much, and I could bear it no longer.

NOT PARABLE BUT REALITY.

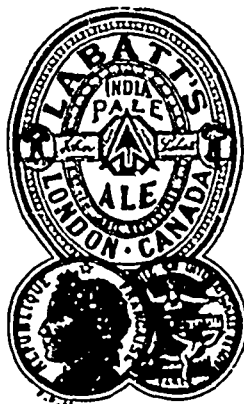
But as I lifted my eyes from that sad spectacle, in quest of the man with whom I had spoken, lo, he was gone, and with him the whole vision passed. Yes, like a flash it went, yet, no sooner had I turned round about, than, instead of the one great Babylon, I seemed to catch, as in a sudden view, the sight of modern cities, the hives of industry, the marts of commerce, brought in an instant together and making a world-metropolis, filled with the same multitudes I had been watching. And if the figures of Mammon and of Belial were not erect in their streets, the reason was that these worshipping idols had taken up an abode in their hearts. That city was there before me; the idolatry was manifest on every hand.

A South African Chief.

A modern traveller gives an account of a king or South African chief who wished to dispatch a message to one of his favorite warriors who had fallen in battle and whose remains had been entombed with the usual pomp and ceremony. How did he proceed to carry out his wish? He called into his dead presence a little naked boy of the tribe, and gave him the message verbally. He made him repeat it till he was satisfied that the poor child had thoroughly grasped it. Then the powerful savage drew his sword, and with a single well-directed blow struck off the boy's head, exclaiming: "Go and deliver my message." Now, whatever we may think of the barbarity this indicated, it at least proves that the savage king believed (a) that his warrior still existed somewhere, and, what is more, that (b) the boy, whose head he had severed from the trunk, would also continue to live on in some other sphere, and might even communicate with others in a similar condition. Such instances might be multiplied. One more, and a really pretty one is from the history of the Seneca Indians. "When a maiden died, they had a custom of imprisoning a young bird until it first began to try its powers of song. Then, loading it with messages and caresses, they loosed its bonds over the grave, in the belief that it would neither fold its wings nor close its eyes until it had flown to the spirit-land and delivered its precious burden of affection to the loved and lost." Among other peoples, we find indications of the same belief, though manifested in a somewhat different manner.

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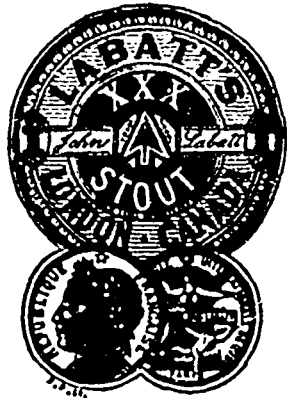


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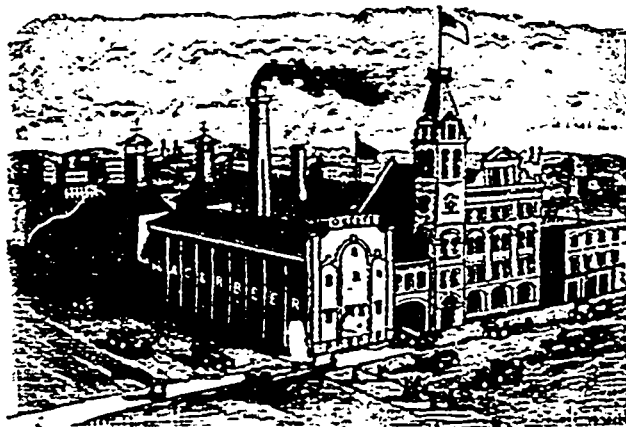
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