

And more especially does this inward tendency declare itself at seasons of penitence, such as Lent, seasons when the spirit of the man is sent back upon itself, is summoned to explore the hidden recesses of his will, to sift and analyse his deep-seated motives, to examine himself and confess his sin, and enter into the shadows of self-humiliation. That is what is meant by a religious use of Lent, that is all that the main mass of earnest believers intend by their Lenten devotion; and the earliest social reformer, even if he can allow all this penitential trouble to be spiritually valuable, cannot but ask whether it is calculated to create or invigorate the strongest type of the good citizen at his work in the big world. Can the two aims hang together? Do the two cities correspond—the city of man on earth that “now is,” and the city of God, the Bride of the Lamb? Now our Prayer Book, at any rate, has a very clear idea that they do. It has, indeed, a great deal to say about sin, and penitence, and confession, and pardon, and all the mysteries of the soul at war with itself. It would dedicate its Lenten season largely to the invisible struggles, where the spirit wrestles all night in some black loneliness of agony, face to face with a nameless God, whom it will not let go until He bless. Nevertheless, it deems it part and parcel of this same spiritual process to start off, we see, at the opening of Lent with the demands recorded in my text. Plain and straight enough these rough, homely words. No unearthliness about them. We are not wafted off to any mystic world, strange, and vague, and intangible, and remote, and faint and fear before our secret imaginings. No, indeed! Very near it lies this world of which they speak. Very obvious and very matter-of-fact the obligation that they press home. It is not a question that concerns some future condition of the soul in the silent abyss of heaven. But what its state to-day! What is it doing at this hour? What will it be about to-morrow? And the entire concern is the positive outward, undeniable facts, not the inward temper, or moods, or emotions. It is our acts that are arraigned, and these acts are all of them social; they are acts done to or towards our neighbour. They are the acts of citizens living under the close and incessant representations of an organized society. This is the way to begin your Lent, so the Prayer Book cries. This is the door through which to pass in within the recesses of the divine humiliation. If you want to draw nearer this year to the blood-sweat of Gethsemane, and to the bitter Cross of Calvary, and to the holy sanctuary of your Easter feast, then there is one inevitable inquiry which blocks the way. It is perfectly simple, and no one can mistake it. It is this: What sort of a citizen are you? What kind of neighbour have you been? Do you rob; do you lie; do you remove your neighbour's landmark; have you perverted the judgment of the widow, or the fatherless or the stranger? Have you smitten your neighbour secretly; have you taken reward against the innocent; have you been unmerciful to the helpless; have you extorted any gain from the weak and the ignorant? Have you used craft or force to win your own end; have you ground down the poor; have you been greedy of gold? Have you wrecked the bonds of marriage and of the family for your own evil passions; have you poisoned the moral atmosphere by your uncleanness? Have you sinned against the brotherhood by slander and malice and falsehood? If so, and if this is still your portion, then you are under a curse—the curse of God; you are banned and barred. No Christian Lent for you. There is no getting any further into the consolation or the gifts of the spiritual life. The curse is on you; your spiritual life is blighted; your soul is in prison; your strength is sapped; your claims or rights are all stripped off you; you are a marked man. You may not belong to the company of those who go up into the sanctuary of God; you are cast outside, branded, set apart—a felon bound under a doom. You must purge yourself of the charge of the crime, if you are to enter the ranks of loyal citizens of the Kingdom who have passed out of the darkness of the curse into the light of Divine Society.

This is the godly discipline which you profess, through the Church, your desire to restore. You must be prepared to join with your deliberate Amen, with the whole assembly pronouncing your own curse on all such social sin. “Ah,” but you say, “this rough, plain speaking misses its aim after all, by its very rudeness. It belongs to primitive, to barbaric days of early Judaism, when men sinned with a strong hand, with a brutal frankness. They went at it with a cart-rod. In the Psalms and in the prophets we are taken back to days when the public conscience had no definite standard of right that it could enforce, and a bad man was not ashamed to make his villainy his open rule of life. He deliberately set himself to rob, to take advantage of the weak, to pillage the widow and the orphan, to lie with his neighbour's wife. There was nothing to make him afraid or abashed. But now only professed criminals act like that. What is the use of attacking us with bare and raw challenges of that kind? Of course, we should not be here in church

we should not be proposing to keep Christian Lent, if we were not ready to lay our hand on murder, and stealing, and adultery, and extortion. A light task this that you ask of us, to come here to church and pronounce other people outside accursed. We could do that much with an easy conscience; but what would be the profit? Is it not rather cheap? Has it nothing of the Pharisee about it—to stand up here and thank God that we are not like those wicked publicans, who lie, and cheat, and rob?”

That is a very pertinent question, and if we had nothing in view but our own separate individual lives it might be difficult to recognise the bearing of the curse upon ourselves. But, my brethren, we none of us stand alone. Each is a member of a class, of a set, of an interest, of a trade, of a church. And nothing surely is more noticeable and more startling to all who are anxious over social miseries than the discovery of the selfishness, the recklessness, the cruelty with which a class, or a set, or an interest, or a trade, or even a church is capable of acting. We do in the mass what no one of us would consent to do on his own responsibility, nay, what each one of us would hotly repudiate. We know how it all happens, how easily in the case of a company or a board! The responsibility for the action is no fixed lodgment. It has no seat, no judgment hall, no court of appeal. No one knows with whom exactly it lies. It is shifted from shoulder to shoulder, until the last man, finding no other to whom to pass it on, drops it quietly off into some ditch, and it is no one's business to know its disappearance. There is no audit on the side of conscience, no annual report in the company's book of how it fares. Everybody supposes that somebody else is looking out that nothing is wrong, or else they settle down to the belief—a very practical belief—that morality is not the affair of a company, or of an industry, or of a corporation; in the familiar and most wicked phrase, “A company has no conscience.” Such societies must seek their own naked interests. They cannot spend their time in inquiring how their neighbours may be affected by their action. They have enough on their hands already in determining the conditions of their own success, which is their sole proper business. How can a railway company or a joint-stock bank have moral obligations beyond the elementary principles of honesty, without which trade could not exist? How can they be saddled with duties to their neighbour as well as to themselves? So we all murmur palliating phrases to choke down the sense of horrible discomfort with which we find that we have reaped profits from a course of action which has sweated down some miserable workers into infamous conditions of toil and life; or has made home for them unknown and impossible through the long hours that we have mercilessly imposed upon them; or has given them over to heartless death under chemical poison, through sinful neglect of the precautions which a touch of human nature would have made imperative; or we have been dependent for our dividends on casual and unorganized labour which was inevitably bound to demoralize all who were concerned in it; or have got rents from slums which were a sanitary disgrace and a moral degradation, or from public houses which fattened on the hideous drunkenness which their blazing gas and roaring heat fed into fever! Ah! Is there no room here for a plain, straight course on the sins that are open, on the sins that are reckless, on the sins that are savage! Yet these are the sins which we in some corporate capacity too often aid and abet. As we review the ugly roll of wrong, is it, let us seriously ask ourselves, against others only and in no way against our own shamefaced selves that we to-day pronounce, “Cursed are they that make the blind to go out of their way! Cursed are they that take a reward for slaying the innocent! Cursed are the unmerciful, the extortioners, the covetous! Cursed are they that put their trust in men, and make not God their defence!”

Yes, we sin through the irresponsibility of companies; or, again, we may sin through becoming the tools of a system. We all know how heartless, how mechanical a system can become. Take commercial speculation—the money market. The men engaged in it are honest, kindly, excellent; they propose to themselves nothing that is not considered legitimate according to the rules of a business. Yet the system itself that is created by their concerted efforts, what of it? What of its effects? How blind, how regardless, how inhuman may its workings be! How far it may carry us from all conceivable relation to moral responsibilities! As a system it has taken advantage of others' ignorance, of others' stupidity, of others' infirmities, it has reaped gains from others' vanity and greed. Its normal work has been to exaggerate all the fluctuations and uncertainties and disturbances of the money market, driving them into unnatural excess in order that the rapidity and extravagance of the variations might heighten the probabilities of profit. It has done its utmost to stamp down that which was showing signs of weakness, though that weakness might be temporary or accidental, or as to make recovery for

it impossible. It has run up that which was promising to some unworthy or inflated prominence, and then has hastily deserted it before the terrible recoil followed which its own exertions had made inevitable, leaving the destruction to break on the foolish and the ignorant, who did not have the wits to understand that they were following a leader who would be found to have withdrawn when the crisis came. Alas for the wreckage that lies strewn on every shore of this wild and savage sea! Alas for the stranger and the widow and the orphan engulfed in a fate of which they never understood the risks! Alas for the broken heart of the man whose savings and whose happiness have been the stake which another man, while he himself was unaware of it, has laid and has lost on some desperate odds!

My brethren, as we look round the English money market to-day, dare we say there is no meaning for us in the curse of him who removeth his neighbour's landmark, of him who is unmerciful, and him that maketh the blind to go out of his way? Again, classes, interests, professions, those who commit gross sins from which any individual member of them would instinctively shrink. There is a horrible momentum which a vast profession or class acquires—a momentum to accumulate self-interest. Always a profession makes in the mass for what is best for itself; it sustains an unceasing pressure in the one direction; it pushes its own way forward, with the blind weight of a tide. It cannot as a body regard any other interest but its own. It is inherently selfish. Year by year, bit by bit, it will go on piling up these resources; it never loses a step once gained, it never misses an opportunity for great and solid advance; it thrusts aside what obstructs; it beats under what is weaker than itself. It all happens by the sheer force of the situation. No one person exactly intends it, only each will do on behalf of his class what he would never dream of doing on behalf of himself, and the volume of united selfishness is ever moving on. So it comes about that a great and honourable profession, such as that of the lawyer and that of the clergy, has again and again arrived at a point where it stood convicted by the outraged conscience of its fellows of the most inhuman injustice, harshness, cruelty, greed, ambition; so a propertied class has before now come to build up its stability in the most monstrous oppression. It has tolerated criminal miseries at its very door without seeming to see that they existed; it has acquiesced in a condition which its own supremacy has made to seem familiar, and yet which every human-hearted member in the class would condemn with indignation if it was his own benefit which was bought at such a price. A class, an institution, has no eyes to see what its own prosperity costs to others. Thus it is that these social crimes have been committed which have been blotted out in revolution and blood. Ah! yes; and thus it is that the Church of Jesus Christ, founded in mercy, and pity, and loving kindness, knit together into the love of the brotherhood, in the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of Peace, has, as an organization, as a national institution, yielded to the impulse of its own self-interest, and has suffered itself to arrive at a position which has become the very by-word for arrogance and merciless ambition. All this has happened; we know it but too well; the grim ring of history records it over and over again with an iron pen graven in the rock for our warning.

My brethren, is it impossible that it should be repeating its doleful tale now before our eyes to-day in England? Is there not evidence enough on every side, far and wide, to make us suspect ourselves, to alarm, to stagger? We all feel so innocent, so well-intentioned, so right-minded. Why, then, this passionate wrath which rises into our ears from those that suffer? Why this sullen roar of hate all around us? Why in Merry England, our fair mother-land, the home of freedom, the green island set as a jewel in the midst of the seas—why this dark terror that hangs over us? Why this awful cloud of misery? Why do we fear to look our brothers in the face, as the fierce war of competitive industry clangs on and on, and the weak are crushed, and the old are forsaken, and the bitterness of division grows sharper and more terrible? Why, above all, is it that this Church of ours, this Church of England, so dear to us, so rich in her Catholic inheritance, so interwoven into England's story, so tingling with English blood, a Church, too, so teeming with activity, so fervent, so alive with zeal and prayer and worship; why is it that she should show herself to the masses of English workers in country and town, now at the very crisis of their fate, as the symbol of all that is aloof from their life, cold to their aspirations, suspicious of their aims, helpless in their needs, the type of all that is privileged, and propertied, and jealous, and unsympathetic, and everything the least like Christ? Surely there is wrong here, such wrong that brings with it a curse, deep and large and grave. We can find no such wrong in ourselves. No! But we are members of the Society which is thus at enmity with itself, of the nation which is embittered by these heart-burnings, of the Church

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