

THREE GREAT LAW BREAKERS.

SELECTIONS.

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If a foreigner should accuse the citizens of the United States of a disregard for law, they would probably regard the charge as a gross slander. We are in the habit of pluming ourselves as a law-abiding and order-loving people. And yet it must be conceded that we are a long-suffering people under notorious and shameless infringements of our laws, and that there is a vast amount of "dead-letter law" among us. We have taken pains to speak before on this subject. Our attention is called to it again by the recent and nearly simultaneous death of three very prominent and notorious persons, all long-time residents of the metropolis of this country. It has occurred to us that if a British tourist should have visited our country about three years ago, and should have animadverted upon the lives, employments and influences of William M. Tweed, John Morrissey and Madam Restell, in just and natural terms, the impulse of our people would have been to resent the attack as they resented the attack of Dickens upon the American institution of slavery. Not to say that our people would ever seriously have defended the crimes of political corruption, gambling and abortion, yet so great would have been the sensitiveness of the sore spots that they would have shrunk from the probe of the censor.

The anger of men at the exposure of their vices is much deeper than their pleasure at the approval of their virtues. So all the praise which Dickens bestowed upon our State prison system and our charitable asylums could not allay the irritation which he excited by his just denunciation of slavery.

Doubtless, the foreign tourist would have been in error in assuming that the toleration and prosperity of such persons as Tweed, Morrissey and Restell was a fair index or gauge of the moral state of the community, but he could not have been blamed for remarking such an astonishing spectacle, nor for accusing so supine and indifferent a community of

practical participancy in their crimes. That one man should have arisen from the condition of an uneducated mechanic to the rank of State Senator, to the absolute control of a great political party, and the undisputed disposal of millions of the public money, and should for years have controlled elections and made and unmade high officials by his breath, all through the undisguised practice of bribery and corruption; that another man, originally a professional prize-fighter, should have been repeatedly chosen by wealthy and aristocratic constituencies to seats in the State Senate and the lower house of Congress, while all the time the proprietor of a gambling-house; and that a woman, by profession an abortionist, should have lived in a palace on Fifth avenue, and flaunted her showy equipage in Central Park; and that all these persons should for so many years, either not have excited or have escaped the vengeance of the law, certainly argues a very singular condition of morals. In truth there is always a sort of secret sympathy and admiration in every community for successful and brilliant defiance of the law. For how many years did very respectable men quote Tweed's formula, "what are you going to do about it?" with a tacit assent to the idea that it would probably be of little use to try to do anything about it. Even now, there are probably a good many virtuous and respectable people who think rather impatiently of Mr. Comstock's efforts to suppress infanticide and obscene literature. There was a good deal of shrewdness in the reply made by a lawyer whom the writer once detected in the act of purchasing a copy of the *Police Gazette*: "Is it possible that you buy that paper?" "Certainly," was the reply, "what gentleman doesn't?" So long as a crime does not affect ourselves, or involve human life, our sympathies for the sufferers are not apt to be very acute, and in fact are quite apt to be on the side of the offender. Men always like to see the weaker party come off best. That was the feeling which led ladies to visit highwaymen in their cells, and give them flowers on their way to execution. In regard to offences like those of Tweed, it may be added that "what is every-