

Juvenile Depravity and Crime in our City.

A SERMON,

BY

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WITH AN APPENDIX

EMBODYING THE

RECENT REPORT OF THE CHIEF OF POLICE

CONCERNING DESTITUTION AND CRIME AMONG CHILDREN IN THE CITY.

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SERMON.

‘SUFFER the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.’—*Mark x. 14.*

BEFORE entering upon the substance and argument of the present discourse, I wish to sketch two separate and opposite pictures, as distinctly as a few brief words will outline and color them, and to impress them vividly upon your minds and on your memories.

Of the first picture, the time is morning and the scene a country village, bosomed in green hills, with a lake smiling and shining in the distance. The central figure of the group which fills up the fore-ground is a LITTLE CHILD. He stands upon a sunny slope, with a chaplet of lilies around his brow, and with his whole form seemingly transfigured in the morning light of spring, of life, of love. Beside him is a man—the DIVINE MAN—whose hand is laid upon that snowy brow in benediction. His form, his countenance, his smile, his words, his accents, reveal the harmony of spiritual life within,—the divinity of his mission, his purpose and his thought. Around Teacher and child gather a group of coarsely clad, but earnest, healthful, interested men. The Master is speaking, and his theme is the kingdom of God re-established in the soul by a new birth into indwelling purity, holiness and love. He illustrates the spirit and law of the heavenly state by the young child,—beautiful symbol of divine and everlasting life,—and “of such,” he says, “is the kingdom of heaven.” Fix in your minds the picture,—the Teacher—the child—the thrilled and reverential listeners—the radiant hills and waters filling up the distance—the serene heaven embosoming and illuminating all.

For the second picture look at this. The time is night, the night that closes with peaceful rest the sabbath worship of the soul. Above hang masses of dense cloud and mist, visible by the flaring lamp light, but hiding the quiet and holy stars. The place is an half-subterranean room where the light, struggling through a fetid and poisonous atmosphere, shines lurid, flickering and dim. Upon the walls of the room hang coarse

prints and pictures, portraying brutality and vice in their most low and shameless form. Within a recess are rows of shelves where fiery and drugged liquids shine through half transparent glass. Beyond is an opened door, leading to an inner chamber, containing a crowd of half clad, half drunken, wholly embroiled forms of what once were men and women, made but a little lower than the angels, in the image of Deity Himself. There they revel in the early night, while obscene words and horrid oaths mingle with painful sighs and more painful mirth, and with discordant music complete the tumult and the din. In the foreground is a **YOUNG CHILD**—a little girl—just entered half clad, shivering with cold, from the outer sleet, storm and darkness. Her form is attenuated and languid through sin and sorrow. Her face is sharp, her look importunate, her young brow seamed with unnatural thoughts,—memories of the dark past—wild visions of the darker future. Entering she is greeted by a man—the Master. She yields up her scanty gains, won by theft, beggary, or deeper degradation. He pours out in return a glass of that fiery and poisoned liquid, which she clutches eagerly and drains to its last drop. Her eye lights with preternatural fire, her languid body springs, thus stimulated, into feverish activity, and, with a look and word and gesture indicative of utter infamy, she passes on and is lost to view amid the crowd of revellers within. Fix this picture in the mind, in awful contrast with the former. Remember that it is but the shadow of a reality which exists in all the great cities of Christendom. Remember too that with the coming out of the stars on this Sabbath eve it may be witnessed within a few squares of this very spot, while the evening bells shall open at once the sanctuaries of worship and iniquity, and the child's curse commingle with the man's prayer, and the same breath waft them up to God. And now listen once more to the word of the Son of God, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

My subject this morning, as you have doubtless anticipated, is **THE MAN'S DUTY TO THE CHILD**; the duties which individual and collective Manhood owes to individual and collective Childhood. Let this be the subject and these the divisions of our thought.

The little child is a type of divine innocence,—a symbol of the realities of eternal life in heaven. Its birth is an advent, its form a divine creation, its spirit a divine incarnation. In it the human form is newly consecrated by the descent and manifestation of the life of the indwelling God. It is revealed

to us—heaven's latest miracle—to wean us from worldliness and sensuality and egoism; to renew the faded verdure and spring-tide of the soul; to unseal the frozen fountains of our primitive and spiritual life; to touch the heart to gracious issues; to direct the energies to higher and purer purpose; to baptise us in sacred memories; to awaken in us longings and yearnings for our rest in the Father's bosom and for our home in his holy and untroubled skies. This is the primitive mission of the child. Though it be so seemingly helpless, and so unconscious of its power, it moves the heart with a mightier spell than belongs to Art, or Learning, or Philosophy, or Poetry, or Eloquence. To those tender fingers all the chords of the soul are familiar, and untaught it exercises a mastery and an awakening over all. It awakens the dumb oracle of conscience and unseals to faith its visions of futurity. It calls out from darkness the perennial currents of our human love. It awakens memories of the Eden lost through self and sense. It kindles hopes and longings for the better Paradise to be won and enjoyed forever through the spirit of self-consecration and the deeds of pure self-sacrifice. I do not, I cannot over-estimate the infant's influence. Your hearts, my own, bear witness to its potency. In homes and hearts made purer and more blessed by the advent, go up continual thanksgivings—So God be thanked for the gift and the mission of the little child.

Such being the child's influence upon the Man, what is the Man's duty to the child? With earnestness let us ask, with purposes of fidelity let us receive the answer. The child is the passive recipient of influences, whether they be good or evil. It has no power to determine the character of its home, no "wings of a dove to fly away and be at rest" from strife, from evil, from contamination. It can neither evade nor repel the poison of a corrupt atmosphere or the malaria of encompassing vice. Here is the Infant Angel. Its eyes are yet bright with heavenly intimations. Its form, moulded to a divine grace, is yet distorted not by evil. It is a lamb without spot, a white bud that has no mildew on its leaf, no worm within its core. To man's care—aye, and surer still, to woman's love—God hands down His youngest and His fairest. The heir of immortal life, the pilgrim of unwasted ages,—with its mind to sweep the circle of the universe, with its heart to glow with a seraphic ardor, with its will to win victories of sovereign virtue,—to man's care, to woman's love, I repeat, doth God intrust it. Folded up within that frail and feeble organism is a spirit that is to live forever. Within that spirit lie august possibilities of wisdom and goodness;

elements which, rightly cultured and directed, shall impart new light and love to earth, new blessedness to complete the final harmony of heaven. We are to stand in that earthly relation to the child which angels sustain to it in heaven. And in order that every consideration may bind us, every allure-ment draw us to our duty, God makes the child not only His, but ours,—life of our life, flesh of our flesh, soul of our very soul.

Now a man can conquer circumstances of evil provided his spiritual will be quickened: he can gain virtue in the midst of imminent temptations: he can win victories for God on earth's great battle-field though all the powers of darkness be let loose upon him. *But the Child is passive.* Circumstances exercise over it a forming and influencing power. Poison may be mingled with its food and with its drink that shall disease and madden its young life in body and in mind. It may drink vice from its mother's bosom and imbibe contagion from its father's touch. That the sins of the parents are thus visited upon the children is alike God's Word and Nature's Law. The infant is as passive to the influences about it as the violet is to frost or sunshine, or as the youngest lamb is to the balmy south or the sleety and chilling north. If you expose your household bird to the snow and frost, it will die. If you place your household rose-tree in the dark and stagnated air of a cellar, or if you saturate its roots or leaves with a poisonous gas, or expose it to the outer night of winter, its leaves will shrink, its blossoms fade from beauty into blackness and decay, and it will perish from its farthest tendril to its deepest root. The child is as susceptible to surrounding influences as the rose-bush or the bird, the spring violet or the unweaned lamb. Nay as much more susceptible as its organism is more complicated and delicate and its capability more divinely beautiful and lasting. That young life, in constant process of formation, must take outline, color and direction from the influences that immediately surround it and perpetually inclose. Thus, unless the atmosphere of the home be genial, healthful, loving and beneficent the child must grow to maturity, imperfect, unhealthful and depraved.

There is, then, a duty incumbent upon the Man in his relations with the child, whose sacredness and whose importance cannot be over-estimated. Good grows out of faithfulness, evil out of unfaithfulness, which Eternity can alone reveal. In every household, *Holy Angels*, invisible but most real, gather in sacred council around the cradle of the newborn babe. They consider the peculiarities of its genius and

the special capabilities of its nature. Spirit guardians are appointed, whose duty it is to minister to its needs, perpetually imparting vigor of life and justness of direction to those growing germs of wisdom, energy and love; and thus is that true which is written that "their angels behold the face of the Father which is in Heaven." But these influences are purely spiritual. Angels can only minister to the inward mind and life. Their sphere of action does not include the material and the sensible. Now you are called upon to co-operate with Angels, you are called upon to see that the pure, virgin life is fed with influences from the external world to correspond with those inward influences of the divine life. You are called upon to see that the organism be so built up in purity and health, that it shall not be to the indwelling soul, a prison or a lazar-house, but a shrine of beauty and of strength. You are called upon to see that no enemy sow tares among the wheat,—that no fatal vice be established as a constitutional habit before as yet the young spirit can distinguish his right hand from his left,—vice from virtue. You are called upon to see that no fatal delusion of error be burned in upon the intellect, before as yet the young mind be able to separate the light from darkness,—the true from the false. You are called upon to see that no temptation be brought near it before there is Will quickened to overcome as well as Consciousness to discern the wrong and its consequences. You are called upon to see that the growing germs of wisdom and goodness be cherished and rightly directed. You are called upon to watch for each indication of genius, capability and direction, and to adapt your impartation and government to the peculiar exigency. You are called upon to see that your child, who is also God's child, fulfils the divine end of its creation, and occupies that sphere of usefulness for which Heaven has specially organized and directed its spiritual life. You sin in neglecting the culture, either of body, mind or heart. From the bread that nourishes the body, to the truth and love that feed the soul, must extend your supervision. The instinctive and unwise fondness of the mother who displays her love by dress, by indulgence, by pampering the appetite into disease, or by indulging the will till it becomes wilfulness, is as evil in its effects as the opposite extreme of government maintained through brutal force, and affections stifled by unwise severity. The wolf who gives her young pure milk is more faithful and commendable in her duty than the woman who feeds her child with stupifying opiates or passion-creating luxuries. Parental love is not instinctive but spiritual. It is the soul that asks care and culture, not alone the outward form.

Neither have you a right to force the life of the child into a channel that its intuitions resist: no right to say imperatively what avocation, provided it be useful, it shall or shall not follow: no right to insist that your child shall be a merchant, a lawyer, or statesman, because this opens the way to wealth and position, or shall not be the artist, the artizan, the teacher spiritual or intellectual, because these avocations involve less of gain and more of labor and of sacrifice. God has need of all his children in carrying out his vast designs. Spiritually he organises them for their several spheres of life, and implants in them an instinct and an impulse toward their providential calling. He who gives to the sky-lark its wings and its aspiration to soar in the morning heaven and to "pour out its full heart" in the matin song: He who gives to the young swan, born beside the arctic snows, its longing to float in tropic streams and to feed among the tropic flowers, and who guides it from zone to zone upon its unknown way:—the same God has implanted in your child its angel instinct with its angel wing, and through the might of aspiration and in the direction of its desire, he seeks to guide it to its providential calling, and its glorious destiny of usefulness and joy. You are then—and not alone parents, but all who ever have passed the threshold of home and been where children dwell—you are then to co-operate with angels, and to follow the guiding intimations of the Heavenly Providence. You are to protect the young child from all that may injure it in body or in soul. According to the clearness of your light and the measure of your ability you are to educate it in mind, heart and will; you are to afford full scope to its genius and to aid it, as far as in you lies, in finding and in filling that position of usefulness which God has designed it for, that thus His purpose and its blessedness may be fully won.

These views are, I know, not new to you. I do not offer them as in any degree novel, original or peculiar. I take higher ground. They are absolute, imperative, universal. They are fixed in the economy and rectitude of God: they are the intuitions of each pure and healthful soul: and being God's truth, they reveal our duty;—and wo, wo to us and to our children, if we refuse to hearken and obey. What the world needs for its redemption, is not novel theories, not accumulated gold; but clear-minded, pure-hearted, right-willed men and women, who shall be visible manifestations of angelic life and harmony; who shall unfold divine order and radiate divine love in their orderly and faithful lives: and thus, inspiring the world with a higher virtue, and gladdening it with more real

beauty, awaken it from its selfishness, its sensuality, its distrust of men, its sceptical doubt of Providence, to a new and fruitful hope. And men and women, in large societies at least, can never come but from children maturing in the midst of celestial and healthful influences, and so prepared for inspirations of the Highest and the Holiest, and thus for earthly realizations of heavenly and harmonic life. "Of such is," and from such must be unfolded, "the kingdom of Heaven."

Our duties to our own children derive their peculiar sacredness from the fact that each child of ours is also God's child. And now in further consideration of the subject we are brought on to look these questions in the face. Does our responsibility to God for the culture and care of His Children end with the discharge of the duties we owe to those of them whom by private ties he has made our own? If little children, left friendless and unprotected, are irremediably polluted and destroyed before the dawn of moral consciousness or moral will, is not this crime a disregard to duty for which those who are guilty must render up an account to God? If they are deprived of their natural protectors, or if these wickedly betray their trust, is not the community, in its individual members, and as a collective unity, made chargeable with their education and right direction? If thousands in a community are forced to grow up with passions stimulated to madness, and with consciences deadened to idiocy,—if their only homes are dens of unimaginable guilt and shame, where instead of fathers or mothers they have thieves and harlots for their instructors, or if their parents themselves are thus fatally and foully lost,—if the only education which their faculties receive is complete perversion,—if the only obvious path to gain or pleasure, is through beggary, theft, or personal desecration,—if thus from the cradle they are saturated with evil to the farthest fibre of their nature,—is not Manhood responsible for it all? Is not Manhood's neglect of duty the cause of the child's destruction? Will not God hold man to an account for these little ones so cruelly destroyed? And if men say, each one answering for himself, "they were not mine," will not God reiterate that solemn inquiry, "*Where are they? THEY WERE MINE!*"

There is, in almost every community, an ignorance of duty, and an evasion of responsibility, and a consequent desecration and destruction of innocent childhood, which is undreamed of among all. I have not been dealing with suppositions but with realities. The evil, to which allusion has been made, has, like a cancer in the system, struck its roots

into our own community, and this city, whose wealth is so great, whose advantages so numerous, whose prosperity so unexampled, nourishes within its bosom this deadly wrong.

A spectacle is presented in our midst which might rather seem the dream of an insane fancy, than the reality of a Christian age. The recent report of the Chief of Police discloses the fact that THREE THOUSAND CHILDREN, from eight years and upwards, in the lower wards of our city, gain subsistence solely by theft, beggary, or unnameable vice. If we add to this estimate those under eight years who are growing up under the same influences, brothers and sisters of these, and if we extend our survey to include the entire city, we shall arrive at the conclusion that eight thousand children are involved in this extremity of evil. And thus our infant population is decimated, not by a conscription, not by a famine, not by a pestilence, but by a destroying curse that eats from body to soul and involves the whole nature in its ruin.

It is hard to speak of this in calm language or in cool blood. Little children, one in ten in the lower wards, sent out to pilfer, to importune, to sink into utter depths of personal degradation, spending their days in vice among each other and in war against mankind, returning at nightfall to yield up their wages of fraud and shame to unnatural owners or more unnatural parents, and then devoting the night to low revelry, sinking soul and body in one common hell! From these nurseries of crime come the bold and unscrupulous enemies of society, who furnish votes to the demagogue, torches to the incendiary, and weapons to the assassin: from these come those pale and miserable unfortunates whose life is a continual destruction of purity and virtue: from these come those corrupters of the young, parasites and panderers, who remorselessly destroy the children of opulence and station, plundering them though ministering to vice. Within these abodes of darkness, prayer is seldom offered, or reformation attempted. Law is learned but for its evasion, and Virtue, and Truth, and Chastity, and Religion are trampled on as fictions of an unnatural society. This devouring vortex is fed continually by the unfortunate, the intemperate, the exhausted poor, who, losing all self-respect with the loss of property, or virtue, or standing, or health, hide themselves in miserable dens, where their children grow up deformed and embroiled, and from whence they issue to their evil trades. There orphaned children, whose widowed mothers have perished in unknown want, sink into the hands of harpies in human shape, who shelter them till they can go forth to plunder or be sold for a price. There in noisome abodes lingers

the pestilence, slaying in secret, and gathering power for noon-day ravages. There is the inner court of private vice and the fastness and citadel of public crime.

I will not, I dare not fully unveil the hideous picture, the more hideous reality. It is enough to say, that of the young children in the denser part of our city, one in ten is doomed to a life of inevitable vice, misery and degradation; doomed to be ground to powder in the vortex of infamy and shame. Yes, those whom God has made helpless that their helplessness might defend them,—those whom God has made innocent, that their innocence might reach man's heart and make him the guardian of their purity,—these, in the midst of that innocence, and because of that defencelessness, are remorselessly destroyed. They are led like young lambs to the slaughter. They are despoiled of their divine birthright and their rich inheritance. They are robbed of their strength, their light, their love, their destiny. They are cast not into the grave,—that were a mercy,—but into a hell of wrong, that they may pass a lifetime in self-consuming agonies.

We call the old Spartans barbaric and unnatural, because they exposed their newly-born to the mountain cold that the weaklings might perish; we condemn the ancient Libyans as devil-worshippers, because they passed the first-born through the fires to Moloch; we name the Hindoos heathen and cruel, because they offer young infants to the crocodile-god of their sacred river, the Ganges; we find no language with which, in sufficient severity, to denounce the Carolinian or Virginian Planter who is reported to sell his own offspring to a life of toil in the corn-field or the rice-swamp;—but what shall we say, what shall we do, when God's children, in our own midst, are cast out to the wolves of a moral wilderness—passed through fires fiercer than those of Moloch, to a darker doom,—thrown into a stream whose billows are like lava, where love, and virtue, and innocence, and hope, are overwhelmed and lost,—sold to the service of a more cruel master than any who wields the slave-whip in the tropics,—forced with the blow and the threat, and the still more horrid allurements and solicitation, to the desecration of body and soul?

Oh, from below the deep foundations of our splendid civilization; from dens of unimagined guilt that reach beneath our churches and our palaces; from charnel houses that witness the enormous agonies of the living-dead; the children, the young children, call to us,—yea Mother, yea Father, each child as dear to God, as sacred, as divine as the youngling of your heart, the first born of wedded love,—they say,—with

dumb lips they say it, but God hears them as well as man,—they say, “We are orphans alike to the love of man and the knowledge of God; earth is all ice to our tread and heaven all darkness to our vision; we are dying, mind and heart, in self-consuming agonies. Oh hear us, pity us, save us; hear us in mercy that God may hear and have mercy on you and your children in the hour of your final need.”

Brethren! I plead for the young children! their lips are dumb as they pass by—a spectral caravan of woe—and their agony must find a voice here where God speaketh, where humanity pleadeth its cause. I plead for the young children in the name of their mothers now arisen, who weep for them from out the skies,—in the name of their Angels who behold the face of the Father, and who go up to Him and say, “we sought to lift them heavenward but men forced them from our arms;”—in the name of your own dear children—their brothers and their sisters,—in the name of Christ, the child of Bethlehem, who brought redemption both for them and you;—in the name of God the Father, both theirs and ours; I plead to day for their deliverance and I know that to this plea your hearts, your Christian hearts respond in every impulse of affection. The last hope of the Orphans; of the three thousand; of the tens of thousands pressing on to follow them; is in the Christianity, Wisdom and Love of this community, made operative and practical. See to it, that the plea, the hope, the expectation be not in vain.

The question before us is simply this: What is to be done; how is this evil to be destroyed; how are these children to be rescued; how are the increasing multitudes who press on in the future to be preserved from the doom which has overtaken so many in the present and the past? Sympathies, unless they flow to practical action, are uselessly excited. Wrongs which are incurable, injure us in their contemplation. If I fail to indicate a method of action, I have erred in picturing this cause so vividly, and in pleading it so importunately.

I would answer this question by saying, that what these children need is kindness, education, remunerative labor. If they had breathed an atmosphere of love; if their faculties of mind and heart had been properly cultivated—if labor had been provided for all of them who were willing to do, this terrible evil would never have arisen to its height. We must then as a community—proceed to organize a *Home for Children*. It should see to accomplish three results: *Reformation, Education, Remunerative Employment*. Its doors should be open for all children wishing through compliance

with its rules to secure its advantages. All children found engaged in beggary or theft should be removed to its shelter. Details resulting from this general plan will readily suggest themselves to all. In order to its immediate organization two things are necessary. The passage of a Legislative Act, authorizing the removal of all vagrant children to the proposed institution. The maturing of a plan and the organization of a Society for the purpose of carrying its provisions into effect. Petitions for the requisite legal powers have already been forwarded and a bill presented for action. Our immediate work is then to inform the public mind and the public heart of the extent of the evil and the practicability of its removal. I know of no duty so incumbent, so pressing, so immediate, so fruitful of private and public good. He who would win a blessing let him take the little child in his arms, and in purity, virtue, and consecration, lift it up to God. But he who would draw down upon his head the lightnings and thunders of retribution, let him set his heel on the child's heart and trample it into ruin, opposing himself to Him who says, “Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of Heaven.”

APPENDIX.

TO HON. CALEB S. WOODHULL, MAYOR OF THE CITY OF NEW-YORK.

SIR: I herewith transmit to you the Semi-Annual Report of the Police Department, commencing with the 1st of May, and ending with the 31st of October, 1849.

In connection with this report I deem it to be my duty to call the attention of your Honor to a deplorable and growing evil which exists amid this community, and which is spread over the principal business parts of the city. It is an evil and a reproach to our municipality, for which the laws and ordinances afford no adequate remedy.

I allude to the constantly increasing numbers of vagrant, idle and vicious children of both sexes, who infest our public thoroughfares, hotels, docks, &c. Children who are growing up in ignorance and profligacy, only destined to a life of misery, shame and crime, and ultimately to a felon's doom. Their numbers are almost incredible, and to those whose business and habits do not permit them a searching scrutiny, the degrading and disgusting practices of these almost infants in the schools of vice, prostitution and rowdiness, would certainly be beyond belief. The offspring of always careless, generally intemperate, and oftentimes immoral and dishonest parents, they never see the inside of a school-room, and so far as our excellent system of public education is concerned, (and which may be truly said to be the foundation stone of our free institutions,) it is to them an entire nullity. Left, in many instances, to roam day and night wherever their inclination leads them, a large proportion of these juvenile vagrants are in the daily practice of pilfering wherever opportunity offers, and begging where they cannot steal. In addition to which, the female portion of the youngest class, those who have only seen some eight or twelve summers, are addicted to immoralities of the most loathsome description. Each year makes fearful additions to the ranks of these prospective recruits of infamy and sin, and from this corrupt and festering fountain flows on a ceaseless stream to our lowest brothels—to the Penitentiary and the State Prison!

Reports have been made to me from the Captains of the 1st, 2d, 3d, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, 10th, 11th and 13th Patrol Districts—from which it appears that the enormous number of 2,955 children are engaged as above described in these Wards alone. And of these *two-thirds are females, between eight and sixteen years of age!* This estimate I believe to be far short of the number actually thus engaged. Astounding as it may seem, there are many hundreds of parents in this City who absolutely drive their offspring forth to practices of theft and semi-bestiality, that they themselves may live lazily on the means thus secured,—selling the very bodies and souls of those in whom their own blood circulates, for the means of dissipation and debauchery. These *embryo* courtezans and felons may be divided into several classes, as follows:

1st: Those who congregate around the piers, &c., where merchandise is chiefly landed. Cunning and adroit in their operations, they daily pilfer immense quantities of cotton, sugar, spirits, coffee, teas, &c., from the bales, hhds, casks, bags, chests, &c., with which the wharves are generally, more or less, loaded; and in the absence of other articles of plunder, they wrench the knobs from doors, steal building hardware from unfinished dwellings, lead and copper pipe, and even tin roofing! They will even, with the owner and consuee looking on, cut open a coffee bag in a manner so sly and artistical, that he is forced to believe the bag burst by accident, and in a few moments some 15 or 20 lbs. are transferred from the planking of the pier to their capacious baskets or aprons. It is no uncommon thing for a hoghead of sugar to be short from 50 to 100 lbs. through their undetected depredations, and the same system of petty abstraction prevails in regard to all exposed articles of a moveable nature. In one instance an entire bale of cotton was stolen piecemeal, by this process, and the perpetrators were only caught when they returned for the purpose of filching the bag itself!

To guard all the property exposed along our docks, would require a policeman upon *each pier* in the lower Wards—a disposition of the force, which the present state of the Department will in no wise warrant, and which indeed would not, in my opinion, be advisable under any circumstance.

The number of children engaged in this nefarious occupation, is estimated at seven hundred and seventy in the districts enumerated.

Arrests are, indeed, frequently made, but it is my duty to inform your Honor, that, so far as I can learn from the Captains of the river districts, these juvenile rogues generally manage to escape. Parents appear in their behalf with tears and promises of a more careful supervision in future, and the petite pilferer is released from durance, with a simple reprimand from the sitting magistrates, to return in one hour to the docks a more confirmed, thieving vagabond than ever!

This course or procedure has become so universal that policemen are discouraged, and, as the owners of the property will seldom take the trouble to appear upon the witness stand, it seems to be proper that some further remedy should be sought.

In the investigation of this unpleasant subject I would beg to direct your Honor's attention to the numerous junk shops, and places where second-hand articles are bought and sold, now existing in this city. It is notorious to those who, as ministers of the law, are obliged to keep a record of these establishments, that more than a moiety of them might more properly be designated "receptacles for stolen goods." They offer a reward for theft, and an encouragement to crime, by the facilities they afford to thieves, both old and young, for the disposal of their stolen wares. There are about two hundred and fifty junk and second-hand dealers in New-York, and of this number, only 129 are licensed in accordance with the ordinances of the Corporation!—under the present law it is necessary to report those not licensed to the Corporation Attorney, who should sue for the recovery of the penalty for the violation of the ordi-

nance. This process is found to be wholly inadequate to the suppression of the evil complained of, the operation being so slow that the offenders pay but little attention to it. It is therefore suggested to your Honor, that Legislative action upon this important, and, as it appears, dangerous branch of business is necessary, so that by placing junk and second-hand dealers in a position similar to hack and stage drivers, they may, for infractions of law, be dealt with in the same summary manner.

I have reason to believe that a statute properly framed in accordance with the above suggestions, would very materially tend to abate the amount of juvenile crime, which is now increasing so rapidly, and that by bringing these always suspicious concerns under the more immediate control and prompt action of the constituted authorities, a great incentive to these petty thefts would be destroyed.

The Second Class of youthful vagrants, are the "Crossing's Sweepers." They are entirely different from those first mentioned, and in regard to moral degradation, they still occupy a lower position. Clothed in rags—filthy in the extreme, both in person and language. Consisting mainly of small girls, one looks in vain for a single attribute of innocent childhood in their impertinent demands. Their persevering advances, and the lewd billingsgate of their voices, involuntarily gives rise to the question, "what fearful fruit will the seeds of sin, thus early sown, bring forth in womanhood?" Citizens generally suppose that in bestowing pennies upon these children, they are performing acts of charity and of mercy. This is a mistake. Whatever may be their gains during the day, the amount is almost always spent during the night in visiting the galleries of the minor theatres, or in the lowest dens of drunkenness and disease which abound in the Five Points and its vicinity. And they oftentimes waste large sums of money amid half-grown boys of similar stamp, in the most disgusting scenes of precocious dissipation and debauchery. The number thus engaged is estimated, in the lower districts, at about one hundred.

The Third Class are also sufficiently well marked to present distinctive features. They like number three engaged is estimated, in the lower districts, at about one hundred. They are mostly girls of tender years, and frequently neatly dressed, modest-looking and in many instances even pretty. Their ostensible business is the sale of nuts, fruits, socks, tooth-picks, &c., and, with this *ruse*, they gain ready access to counting-rooms, offices, and other places, where, in the secrecy and seclusion of a turned key, they submit for a miserable bribe of a few shillings to the most degrading familiarities. By these practices they frequently are enabled to carry home some two or three dollars daily. And this very money, to obtain which the miserable child endangers its present and future welfare, is easily grasped by the often inebriate parents, who, with a full knowledge of the sacrifice by which it is obtained, scruple not to use it, and on the morrow the girl is again sent forth upon same disgusting errand.

The Captain of the 11th Patrol District, in speaking of this class of citizens, says it may be proper to state that most of these children are of German or Irish parentage, the proportion of American born being not more than one in five. Scenes of almost nightly occurrence might, if necessary, be related, which for vileness and deep depravity would absolutely stagger belief.

These enormities have long been known to the Department, and that some among the such an unquestionable shape that I cannot doubt the truth of the statement.

I am aware that there are honorable exceptions to the above, and that some among the hundreds, included in this third class, are in reality honest children, endeavoring to gain a living by the legitimate sale of trifles, but the majority are vicious, and only so; their number is computed in the districts named at 380.

The Fourth Class are *boys*—they are termed "Baggage Smashers;" they congregate around steamboat landings, and railroad depots, apparently for the purpose of carrying parcels for individuals arriving in the city. A large proportion of them have no homes whatever; they will not hesitate to steal when opportunity offers, and live idle and dissolute lives, generally sleeping in the markets, under sheds, and occasionally in cheap lodgings; but the luxury of bed is an article, however, which they seldom indulge in. Of an average larger growth, and more experienced than those classes before mentioned; there is more method in their evil propensities, and not unfrequently are small burglaries traced home to them. There are about 120 thus engaged.

A Fifth Class consists of boys similar to those last mentioned, with this exception—they *have homes*, and many of them are the children of respectable parents, but through a mistaken leniency or a criminal carelessness, they are suffered to spend their evenings and Sabbath with small gatherings on the corners of the streets, annoying the neighborhood and blaspheming. They will often steal, and many of them absent themselves from the roof of their parents or guardians for weeks together, sleeping in market wagons and other places of shelter; consorting with the vilest of both sexes, and forming habits of vice and dissipation which cling to them through all their after years. Frequent complaints are made by citizens in regard to the practices of these juvenile rowdies, but under existing regulations the efforts of the police are found inadequate to the suppression of the nuisance. The number of these is estimated at between 1,600 and 1,700. Besides these, there are reported to me from the above named districts, 2,383 children that do not attend school.

In presenting these disagreeable facts for the consideration of your Honor, I trust that I may be pardoned for the suggestion, in conclusion, that in my opinion some method by which these children could be compelled to attend our schools regularly, or be apprenticed to some suitable occupation, would tend in time more to improve the morals of the community, prevent crime, and relieve the City from its onerous burden of expenses for the Alms-House and Penitentiary, than any other conservative or philanthropic movement with which I am at present acquainted.

Respectfully submitted,

GEO. W. MATSELL, Chief of Police.

