

CHAPTER IV.

LIGHT SHINING IN DARKNESS.

THE era so long anticipated at length arrived, and on Dec. 2d, the sun shone for the last time on the doomed "Old Brewery." This event so marked in the history of the Society awakened the deepest interest in the public mind, as illustrative of which we give the following graphic sketch from the pen of R. A. West, Esq.:

"The day of its demolition deserves to be distinguished as a red letter day in the annals of our city's history. The great landmark of vice and degradation, the haunt of crime and the home of misery, will soon be among the things that were—a remembrance, but no longer a fact. In its stead will rise a landmark for virtue and morality, and a home for the disconsolate and the desolate. The drunkard, and the debased and the stealthy murderer, will no more hie thither for concealment, but sobriety, and purity, and mercy, will stand with open arms to receive whomsoever will eschew vice and make fellowship with virtue. What no legal enactment could accomplish—what no machinery of municipal government could effect—Christian women have brought about, quietly but thoroughly and triumphantly. From henceforth the Old

LIGHT SHINING IN DARKNESS. 65

Brewery is no more. Had any one predicted this ten, or even five, years ago, the laugh of scorn or the smile of incredulity would have greeted his prophecy. The great problem of how to renovate the Five Points had engaged the attention of both the legislative and the executive branches of the city government, and both had abandoned the task in despair. The evil was deemed incurable, and so it seemed to be.

"Nay even some Christian associations were scarcely more hopeful, and hesitated to employ their means on what seemed a Utopian enterprize. This may seem marvellous, but it is no less true, and is to be accounted for, we presume, by the sense of responsibility to the donors of the funds by which such associations are supported, which the members felt made it imperative upon them to employ their means in those undertakings only where the benefit would be obvious and certain. Only on this supposition can we account for the long delay in establishing a mission to the heathen at the Five Points. It is to the credit of the religious denomination known as the Methodist Episcopal Church, that they were the first to enter the then unpromising field; and it will be an imperishable honor to the Ladies' Home Missionary Society of that church that with them the idea originated, and by them has so successfully been carried on. In 1849, at their request, a missionary was appointed to labor among the unhappy residents of this famed locality, the society engaging to give him an adequate salary. Subsequently a change of agency seeming desirable, the Society applied for and obtained from the Bishop the appointment of the Rev. Mr. Luckey. Under Mr. Luckey's active care the mission has so far prospered, and has met with such liberal pecuniary aid, that the crowning triumph has thus speedily been brought about, and the Old Brewery is virtually no more.

"Some years ago the newspapers made partial revelations of the scenes daily and nightly enacted in the Old Brewery. Something more than personal courage was then needed for an exploration of those regions and of that building. The aid of the police was essential, and of the most intelligent, shrewd, fearless and experienced of the department. Murderer's Alley was no romance; and if it had been, the interior of the building was yet full of all villainy and iniquity, and of wretchedness which at any moment might become a temptation to the worst of crimes. It was a place of which all but the utterly degraded stood in fear. The entire locality swarmed with those who prey upon their fellows. Even in open day, citizens avoided the Five Points if possible, or if compelled to pass through it, hurried on in fear of their personal safety. By night none dared to traverse its dark labyrinths. It was a bye-word and a reproach to the city. A foreign author explored its horrible enormities, well guarded by policemen, and told a tale that astonished the civilized world and shamed ourselves. But even he revealed not the half that could have been storied. The private records of police officers, were they accessible, would unfold darker mysteries connected with the Old Brewery and the Five Points than even public imagination ever conceived; while in wretchedness and woe, in penury and want, as well as in low orgies and drunken revelry in their most debasing forms, the place now about to be pulled down was unequalled. It is probable,—for how otherwise could an agent of good have been tolerated in that pandemonium?—that the increased, systematized efficiency of the police had wrought some melioration and restraint in that locality before this mission was established, but the mission of mercy was conceived before such melioration was wrought, and put into operation while yet the streets were flooded with iniquity and

the Old Brewery was a pest-house of vice and of vilest degradation.

"On Sunday afternoon we visited this ill-famed locality, and made a last inspection of the Old Brewery. Divine service was held at 3 o'clock in the large tent, pitched in Paradise Square. There were present boys in ragged clothes and girls in tattered habiliments, and men and women uncouthly attired. But mingled with these, and evincing a lively but unpretending interest in their behalf, were those of high and recognized position, nobly giving countenance and support to the great work of reformation. A tent necessarily presents great temptation to disorder and unsettledness, yet a more attentive audience we have rarely seen; and the children conducted themselves, with but one or two exceptions, as well as the more favored youths of a regular Sabbath school. In one respect we certainly have not seen their superiors—their docility when kindly dealt with. In every instance where there was a disposition to become restless or unruly, we found a reproving smile—the reader will comprehend our meaning—all-sufficient to preserve quiet and restore order. After the service we accompanied a sister of charity—say rather an angel of mercy—on her Sabbath afternoon inquiries after the welfare of the families housed in the Old Brewery. We dived into its cellars—for *cellars* they are, not 'basements,'—and mounted into its attics, and peered into its dark chambers, and found that even there the mission had wrought a most salutary work, and sweeter music we never heard than the hopeful voice of our companion, as with woman's depth of feeling she asked after the welfare of each family, calling the members of each by name; and very pleasant, too, were the words of welcome which every where greeted the visitant.

"But thanks, a thousand thanks, on behalf of morality and religion, to the noble generosity of our citizens, and thanks

no less to the Christian heroism and energy of the Ladies' Home Missionary Society, that the dark and ricketty old building is to be entirely removed. Few can comprehend what it has been; but it is bad enough as it is. There is probably not a stable in this city that is not a palace in comparison with it. For the honor of the city and of our common humanity, we rejoice that its days are numbered."

"On the 27th of Jan., the corner-stone of the new mission building was laid. The exercises opened by the reading of the Scriptures by Rev. J. Luckey, the Missionary there. Rev. Stephen Martindale, P. E., then read a hymn which was sung by the congregation; after which prayer was offered up by the Rev. Dr. Scott, of the First Reformed Dutch Church of Newark. Rev. Dr. Holdich, Secretary of the American Bible Society, then read a brief history of the operations of the Society at the Five Points, in which grateful and especial mention was made of the success, thus far, of the pecuniary efforts of the Society.

"Rev. Dr. De Witt then addressed the assemblage. He said that it gave him pleasure to witness the scene which he there beheld, and to take a part in the exercises of this occasion. He had heard and read much of the enterprise here going on, and had felt a lively interest in its progress and success. He had intended to visit the place, but circumstances

had prevented; and now he beheld with his eyes the fair transformation that is taking place. A building where vice and misery in their most abhorrent forms existed has been leveled, and in its place is going up a new structure which will, in part, be devoted to the service of God, in the beauty of holiness. Here a spring of life will be opened, with its purifying influences. There are buildings in other parts of the city for the rich; but have we not been neglecting the masses? Have we not been too much, like the Priests and Levites, avoiding the degraded classes? This effort in this locality seems to have originated in the spirit which actuated the Saviour, and thus far to have been crowned with His blessing. May this be the origin of a reviving spirit in the Churches!

"The gospel applies to all, but to the poor and wretched of this world it is especially adapted. The impression that those residing in this locality were too degraded to be benefited has tended to paralyze Christian effort. The gospel is for the poor, and it will be deteriorating to the higher classes if reformatory influences are neglected among the lower classes. Dr. DeWitt referred to the condition of Religion in England at the time that Wesley and Whitfield appeared upon the field, and an influence was awakened in the evan-

gical world, which has not subsided to this day. The great amount of good done in the world by the Moravian United Brethren was spoken of. After some further remarks the speaker closed by reminding them that in their good work they could remember the dying words of one much beloved, 'The best of all is, God is with us.' Continue, then, the labor of love in the patience of hope.

"Rev. Dr. Potts spoke of the Five Points, as a festering spot which ought long ago to have been the scene of especial Christian efforts—but, thanks to God, it is now! He looked upon this movement as one of the most important religious, social and municipal efforts existing in the City. Let those who complain of the police expenses, of the taxes, of the crowding of the alms-houses, and of the prisons bursting with criminals, not turn aside when asked to give to this object. None can call in question the practicability of cleansing the Five Points, nor of the many Four Points in our City which seriously require renovation. There is much to be done in the City by Home Missionaries. He hoped that the practicability of this effort would be established by the ladies. If the public did not sustain these local societies in their efforts to keep down vice, we may become as bad as

London, where dissipated youth exist to the number of over 200,000, who are called 'City Arabs.' After some further remarks Rev. Dr. Kennedy addressed them at some length. Twenty-nine years ago he knew of this place. He gave some reminiscences of his own labors at that time on this spot. The first passage of Scripture which he ever undertook publicly to explain was in one of the alleys of this spot to a dying woman, and a number of the residents gathered around him. Who can tell what influences may result from the operations here going forward? Who knows what instrument may be raised up here to promulgate Gospel truths?

"After the conclusion of the addresses, contributions and a collection of \$400 to \$500 in amount were made. The audience then repaired to the front of the new building, to witness the ceremonies of laying the corner-stone. There was singing by the children of the school, who were ranged upon a temporary floor laid upon the joists of the first-story of the building; and there was a large audience present to witness the ceremonies.

"After reading a list of the articles deposited in the box, placed in the cavity of the corner-stone, Bishop ones remarked upon the objects of the building.

'Education is to be promoted—therefore here is to be a free school-room; virtue and temperance are to be advanced, and here we have a lecture-room; the salvation of immortal souls is an end in view, and there will be a chapel in this edifice; and as temporal blessings will be an object, here will be accommodation for the sick and needy.' The Bishop then proceeded to lay the corner-stone, saying: "For the promotion of Education, of Virtue and of Religion, and to promote the best interests of men, and the glory of God, we now lay the Corner-Stone of this edifice, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

"Rev. Nathan Bangs, D. D., then pronounced the benediction; after which the audience separated, the service, novel in that neighborhood, having passed without interruption."

Slowly the building arose upon the foundation, thus laid. At length its completion was announced, and preparations were made for the dedication. "The Daily Times" thus describes the services of the occasion, which took place June 18th, 1853.

The Five Points' Mission House,

Erected on the site of the Old Brewery, was opened yesterday afternoon with religious services, as the centre of missionary and humanitarian enterprise in that infected district of the city. Notwithstanding the excessive inclemency of the weather, a very numerous and highly respectable audience assembled in the chapel of the Mission House. The children of the schools attached to the Mission were also in the room, and sang some simple hymns during and after the services.

After the usual religious exercises, the Rev. Dr. Floy delivered an appropriate discourse, taking for his text the following words: "I beseech thee show me thy glory." Exodus xxxiii. 18.

After referring to the dedication, it says:—"The ceremony is over—the ceremony, but not the results. The beginning is small enough, perhaps, but it is a great step taken. Let us look back a few years, and see what the Old Brewery was. That it was the nest of crime; that the worst passions which deform our common human nature had there their sowing-time and their fruit-season: that young children were there immolated to Moloch, and men and women of ripe years were transplanted thence to bloom upon the gallows, is not half the truth,—is but a small portion of it. There were deeds done in the body that will only be revealed in the spirit, when the Book of Accounts shall be opened. The foulest crimes were hatched, and fostered, and often developed there. There was the home of the assassin, the thief, and the prostitute. Riot swaggered and drunkenness staggered thence, bent on brawls and brutalities; and up those curious stairs and along those winding passages,—

through nests of chambers ingeniously contrived to prevent the escape of the victim or elude the search of his friends, has been borne many and many an unhappy wretch, who by his friends was never heard of again, and never will be heard of till the morning of the resurrection. The old Brewery was, at one time of its history, not excelled by any haunt in London or Paris, as the lazar-house and infectious centre of crime.

"It is gone: it is now a matter of history. Where it stood, a church has been erected, with a house for the preacher, school-rooms for the ignorant, bath-rooms for the dirty, and tenements—clean, wholesome, and inviting—for the homeless. Such a change has been effected by a few earnest, pious ladies, who have succeeded the apostles—who teach Christianity not by words only, but by deeds; who think it not enough to counsel the erring to sin no more, but who take them by the hand, and lead them to the pleasant places.

"Honor to them if they desire it; but they do not. They solicit help, not honor. And who will honor himself by helping them?

"That the aid extended to these ladies will not sink into the earth for lack of fruit, we may assure ourselves by what has already been done by them. In the tenements provided for the desolate class of beings who occupied the chambers of the Old Brewery when it was tolerably purged of crime, and was the habitation merely of misery—which was after public attention had been awakened to it, and just before it was pulled down—we found resident yesterday an orderly class, who know the virtues of water, and are not disdainful of a well-swept floor, and, in their little way, of a well-appointed household. A few ornaments some of them had; and—start them on the right road and a love of nature will

creep in—in two apartments we beheld flowers. And these were the same people, many of them, who were found in the Old Brewery when it was demolished. Such a change can any successor of the apostles bring to pass, if he or she will it, and work for it.

"We looked into the school-room. Children who had friends, and children who had none—in whose faces God had not written thief, murderer, or harlot, but who, if left to themselves, would probably have hereafter become one, or both, or all—these little men and women interested us deeply. They sang some verses for our behoof, at the bidding of the excellent directress of the institution. They lisped with tiny voices, 'I love to go to the Mission-School,' and though it seemed to us that perhaps the warmth of their singing was no proof of the sincerity of their hearts, yet we were glad to accept that evidence of the rescuing hand which had withdrawn them from the defilement of the streets."