



B. M. Palmer

THE
LIFE AND LETTERS

BX
9225
P24
J6

OF

BENJAMIN MORGAN PALMER

BY

THOMAS CARY JOHNSON

*Author of "Life and Letters of Robt. L. Dabney, D.D.;"
"John Calvin and Genevan Reformation," Etc.*



RICHMOND, VA.
PRESBYTERIAN COMMITTEE OF PUBLICATION

7-16777

COPYRIGHTED BY

THE PRESBYTERIAN COMMITTEE OF PUBLICATION

J. E. MAGILL, *Secretary*

1906

PRINTED BY
THE CUMBERLAND PRESS
NASHVILLE, TENN.

talents, his eloquence, and his virtues, well deserves the title of the first citizen of New Orleans.”¹¹

Rarely has an orator had a nobler opportunity. It was his to denounce and prove worthy of destruction a monster organization that had been sucking the life blood of honor, honesty, patriotism and religion, and to plead for the redemption of a great State and the Nation. He had an audience that gave him a huge homage for the life he had lived amongst them for more than a third of a century, and that gave him a large body of sympathizers in his present contention.

There he stood, a modest little gentleman but with a mouth and eyes, a fire-tipped tongue able to pour forth a torrent of argument alike beautiful and terrible, able to lay bare iniquity in the social fabric and burn it as a surgeon an ugly sore with a hot iron. The audience approved Colonel Johnston's designation and greeted the veteran minister, noble patriot and exalted citizen with heartiest and most generous applause.

Dr. Palmer said, according to the report in the contemporary press:

“MR. CHAIRMAN AND FELLOW CITIZENS OF LOUISIANA: I lay the indictment against the Lottery Company of Louisiana that it is essentially an immoral institution whose business and avowed aim is to propagate gambling throughout the State and throughout the country. Being not simply a nuisance, but even a crime, no Legislature as the creature of the people, nor even the people themselves in convention assembled has the power to legitimate it, either by legislative enactment on the one hand, or by fundamental charter upon the other. In other words, I lay the indictment against the Louisiana Lottery Company that its continued existence is incompatible, not only with the safety, but with the being of the State.

“In saying this, sir, I desire to be understood as not simply uttering the language of denunciation. I frame the indictment and I propose to support each of its specifications by adequate proof. And I do this the more distinctly from the conviction that there are many citizens throughout our bounds who, having been accustomed to look at the lottery simply as a means of revenue, either public or private, have not sufficiently considered the inherent viciousness of the system itself. [Applause.] And it is that class which I hope this night to reach and to range upon our side in this great controversy.

“Indeed, sir, if the worst should come to the worst in this present campaign, I for one could wish that all technicalities being swept away

¹¹ See *New Delta*, Friday, June 26, 1891. Cf. also *Southwestern Presbyterian*, July 2, 1891.

there might be some method by which the question could be carried up to the Supreme Court of the United States, whether it is competent to any State in this Union to commit suicide. [Applause.] And if that venerable court should return an answer, which I think they would not for a moment consider as possible, I would then for my part make the appeal to the virtue and common sense of the masses of our people, that the very instinct of self-preservation may stamp out of existence an institution which is fatal to the liberties and to the life of the commonwealth.

"I have laid down a proposition sufficiently broad. Now for the proof. What would you say if a syndicate should be formed in this State or any other State of the Union for the avowed purpose of propagating leprosy [laughter] throughout the land, sending their agents with the utmost activity in order to impregnate every woman and man and child in all the country with the virus of that dreadful disease? Is there a Legislature that is competent to induct such an association into existence? Or, would the people themselves in the exercise of their high sovereignty in convention assembled undertake to render lawful the existence of such a corporation as that? Or, to vary the illustration: Suppose that a university should be endowed with many millions in this State or elsewhere, in order to persuade the people throughout the land of the great advantages of lying and of stealing [applause], sending out their agents in all the avenues of life in order to indoctrinate the people both as to the methods and the advantages of these practices. Is there a Legislature in the land, or the people themselves in convention assembled, who would not immediately recognize that in chartering such an institution they simply dissolve the State? For how can society hold together if confidence be destroyed in the veracity of man to man, or if there be no security whatever in our earthly possessions?

"Permit me to vary the illustration still further. Suppose there should be an organization effected in this city in the interests of murdering, and, by the way, we have had some little experience of that of late. When all the machinery of human justice proving inadequate to defend the safety and life of the Commonwealth, extra legal measures were necessitated under the instinct of self-preservation to stamp out the existence of the Mafia in our midst. [Applause and cheers.] Now, sir, I put the lottery upon the same moral plane with these cases which I have mentioned. [Cheering and applause.] In every view which you take of it it is an institution that antagonizes the State and the people in all their interests, and there is but one issue before this people and I announce it without hesitation upon this platform: either the lottery must go or Louisiana is lost. [Cheers and applause.] And with the point of my finger I write upon the walls of every house in this city and throughout this State, *Carthago est delenda*. Carthage

and Rome could not exist side by side on the same planet, and Rome must conquer and Carthage must fall. [Cheers.]

"If I am asked to sustain by adequate proof the proposition which I have announced as to the inherent viciousness of the lottery system, permit me to say that the first physical matter which forms a basis upon which human society rests is the law of labor. There are moral laws underlying society, as for example that law which demands truth and righteousness between man and man, but as the physical basis upon which all society and government must rest, we find that basis in the law of labor. It was ordained from the beginning by the great Creator when he placed man in his primal innocence in the garden to dress and to keep it, and, when after the fall that light labor deepened into the curse, it became under the decree of heaven necessary that a man should earn his bread by the sweat of his brow. Divine grace coming after it ameliorated the curse and from that day to this under the providence of a kind heaven, labor proves a blessing, hides within its folds and under its forbidding aspect the highest blessings which can be conferred upon the human race. [Applause.]

"It is written in the best of books, that if a man will not work, neither shall he eat. So that from the creation to the time of Christ's appearance upon the earth, it has been the fundamental and universal law under which society exists that each unit in society lives by his individual and personal labor. The farmer harrows the ground, plants the seed in it and reaps the abundant harvest. He blends his industry with the fertility of the soil and with the beneficence of heaven in giving the early and latter rain, and the dews and the sunshine. The common carrier takes the cotton bloom and bears it from the barn of the planter to the distant manufacturer, and in the transportation he stamps a new value upon the original product of the field, and lives by that value which he has attached.

"The manufacturer brings his industry and his skill and his invention, spinning the staple into thread and weaving it into cloth, and stamps upon the cotton bloom a value a thousand-fold more than it originally had, and the manufacturer lives upon the value which he has contributed to the plant. And so, the wholesale merchant and the retail merchant, lifting the pile of goods from under the manufacturer's hands, transports them over the land until they are found in the remotest hamlet and are sold by the yard, and the price paid by the customer measures all the successive values which have been imparted to the original product of the field, and each class lives by the value which he has himself imparted to the same. Mr. Chairman, I am almost ashamed to repeat this earliest and simplest lesson in our political economy. But I do it for the purpose now of asking the searching question: 'What value does the gambler ever create? What new value does he ever stamp upon the value which existed antecedently?'

"What does the lottery do in all of its manipulations but simply shift the products of a preceding industry from one hand to another hand [applause] without the imparting in the process of a particle of value to that which is thus transferred? It may be said that there are customers who not being producers are under the same charge of using up what they do not create. It only emphasizes the position already taken, for even the non-producing class, as for example professional men, live upon that which they in a sense create. The lawyer may not create a new material product, but man being as he is there could be no basis of personal property without the machinery of justice, and he is the representative and organ of that justice, and just in so far as he conserves that which others create, and protects them in the enjoyment of the same, he is worth his living though he may not be a creator of a new material product. The physician who restores health to one who is incapacitated by disease from labor, or who ameliorates the suffering which disease inflicts, becomes by virtue of his calling a necessity to society and is worth in the exercise of his profession all that it costs to maintain him.

"And the preacher, of whom I stand before you a representative, taking even the lowest economic view of his profession as a consumer and not a producer, is an important part of that necessary police force without which the order and position and prosperity of society cannot be preserved. [Applause.] All not being then producers, but consumers, yet in the exercise of their several callings add to the value of what is created and render secure the enjoyment of the same. But what value does the Lottery Company protect, not to say what value does the Lottery Company create?

"Let me illustrate this so that it shall be understood by all present to-night. That company issues, if you please, a thousand tickets of \$500 value apiece, creating thus within its vaults a fund of \$500,000. It has first got to take \$250,000 of that and deposit it safely in its own locker as its portion of the plunder. [Laughter.] It then takes the other half, the \$250,000, and divides it into twenty-five shares of \$10,000 each and puts these into the wheel and the five hundred men may take their chances as to which of them shall get these twenty-five prizes. When at last the prizes are realized, what has been accomplished? Simply the transfer of \$500,000 out of the pockets of one thousand individuals, one-half of it to enrich those who run the machine and the other half divided among twenty-five men, leaving four hundred and seventy-five to hold the empty bag and gain the loss. [Laughter and applause.]

"Mr. Chairman, I do not wish to appear harsh, but will you draw for me the line between this and absolute stealing? [Applause.] If twenty-five men can put their hands into the pockets of four hundred and seventy-five men and take the \$250,000 by which they are enriched

without giving to those four hundred and seventy-five any equivalent, where is the distinction any other than barely a metaphysical distinction without even a hairbreadth's width to mark it between that and what we call in common style a theft? [Applause.] Now, sir, I know the reply to this. There are but two methods by which we acquire property, either by gift or purchase. Now I ask whether these four hundred and seventy-five men have made a gift to the successful winners of the prizes. Each one of those four hundred and seventy-five men, so far from being willing to donate their loss so that it shall become the other's gain, each one of them has been hoping and wishing that he might put into his own pocket the coveted treasure. Was there any good will in the transfer from the loser to the gainer? Is it a purchase? What equivalent has been rendered? It is simply grotesque to speak of that being purchase money which does not amount to one-twentieth of the value of the thing purchased. But, it is urged in answer to this that the parties contract and make the bargain between themselves as to this gain and loss, and that as the losers agreed to take their chances with the rest, it is constructively although not actually a gift on their part.

"Now it appears to me, Mr. Chairman and fellow citizens, one of the plainest principles of ethics that what a man has no right to do, he has no right to bargain to do, and no contract between man and man to do a thing that is unlawful can ever be made right in the sight of man or God simply by the fact that it is a contract between them. I go beyond this and say that the deliberateness of the act when two or more men sit down together and combine to do a thing which in itself was not right to do, the deliberateness of the act makes it more criminal than if it sprung from the spontaneous and sudden act of an individual, and more than all you have in the contract to do the wrong thing not only this deliberateness, but you have the concurrence of two wills, doubling the crime on the part of both. The man who staked his property had no right to stake that property on a chance, and the man who won the property upon that stake had no original right to take it. It was neither a gift nor a purchase and consequently the agreement between the parties to stand simply by the chance was an immoral agreement and no Legislature can possibly make it legitimate. [Applause.] Here then is my first position against the lottery, when I say that it disorganizes society and is incompatible with the safety of the State. It strikes at that fundamental law of labor. It has said to these one thousand men, 'There is no need for you to work. There is a shorter way by which you can enrich yourselves and your families.' Those one thousand men are called away from their proper duties and they fail in meeting that fundamental obligation to live either by the toil of their hands or by the work of their understanding.

"But, more than this, sir. When I have said there is no equivalent

given and no new value imparted when there is transfer of money from one hand to the other through the lottery and its agents, it is a lesson industriously taught the people not only to live by luck, but to live upon the misfortune of their neighbors. I beg the attention of the audience to the announcement of this principle. Sir, it is a solemn thing for any body of men to inculcate it as at all right and proper that we should live simply and alone upon the losses of those that are unlucky. If I win the \$10,000 prize, those that entered into the chance with me have lost just that much and I am enriched through their poverty. Now, sir, let the lottery exist five and twenty years. If only twenty-five men out of five hundred succeed in gaining what the lottery promises, how long will it take to transfer the entire wealth of the State of Louisiana into the hands of one out of twenty of its citizens? What will be the condition of things when one-twentieth of the population own everything upon the soil? And let me ask, sir, how long is any community going to stand that sort of thing? [Applause.] When the country has been led straight up or driven up to the very verge of a precipice, do you suppose that, like a herd of buffaloes, all the people of this State are going to leap that precipice into the boiling and hissing depths below? No, sir; they must and they will recoil, and if this lottery cannot be destroyed by forms of law, it must unquestionably be destroyed by actual revolution. [Tremendous and prolonged cheering and applause.] I fear that I may be trespassing upon the time of the other speakers. [Cries of "No, no, go on, go on."]

"I sometimes hear the apology for the lottery after this sort: 'Oh, it is all wrong. It is immoral, we grant that, but then it is one of the evils which to society is incident and we cannot help ourselves. It is just like drinking. The State knows that the saloon is a deep injury to the State, and if in her power would gladly suppress it, but as men must and will drink, it is wise for the State to throw around existing saloons such restrictions as shall diminish the harm and make the evil less as it bears upon society at large.' Now, the analogy is drawn. 'Gambling is in human nature. Men will gamble, and why should not the State deal with the lottery exactly as it deals with the saloons. Give it license to do its work.' But, sir, without dwelling too long upon the statement, let me dissipate the illusion by showing where the analogy fails.

"Saloons exist, but they exist under protest. They exist under not only the protest of the government, but under restraints such as the State will be able to throw around them. It stands by itself and simply answers the wishes and demands which are made upon it by those who desire the liquor which is sold them, but if you want the parallel to be exact you must convert all the saloons in the country into one grand saloon syndicate [laughter and applause] and that syndicate

must go to the Legislature and demand a charter, and in order that their rights may be beyond invasion ever afterwards it must be imbedded in the Constitution that they and they alone shall have the right to satisfy the thirst of the people. [Laughter.] What next? They open their tap-rooms upon every corner in every city where they gain access, and they hang out their prices, from the pint, earthen mug, quite up to the gallon and hogshead. [Laughter.] And according to the money the parties are willing to pay this saloon syndicate will drown the country with what they desire and what proves their ruin. Not only that, but they have their agents walking the streets thrusting invitations into your face as you walk quietly in your citizenship along the streets of this city to tell you how cheap you may get this drink that you wish, and so they become the propagandists of the saloon.

"That is the crime which I charge now against the lottery. It is not only a gambling place such as other gambling places that are in this city, meeting under the cover of night to satisfy the wishes and anticipations of those who love the gambling, but it becomes the apostle of gambling. It becomes the propagandist of gambling, it goes forth under the charter of the State to persuade man, woman and child wherever they meet them to gamble. [Applause.] It carries the solicitation into our very homes. It meets our cooks when they are going with the basket to get the master's breakfast [laughter] and induces them to gamble. How long, sir, would the country stand a syndicate of saloons, and I ask how long will Louisiana or the country stand this syndicate of gamblers? [Applause.] What I charge, therefore, upon the lottery is not simply that it is a gambling concern, but that it is a university for the instruction in gambling and a high endowment in order to stimulate the process of gambling by and through the country at large. I have only one thing more to say and I am done.

"I have said the lottery must go, because the State cannot be allowed to perish. Why, sir, before the half of twenty-five years have elapsed if this lottery should gain its charter, every man that is able to leave the State of Louisiana will abandon it. [Applause.] Whilst you are holding out our invitations to invite capital and invite population, who shall drain your morasses and stimulate industry and create the wealth of the State, you are holding up this forbidding thing to drive every desirable citizen away from Louisiana. Worse than that, sir,—when you have an institution that goes openly before the Legislature and seeks to bribe it, that in less than ten years after its recharter will carry in its pocket every governor in the State [applause], remove every honest judge from the bench, and put their men in the places to do their bidding, what then will Louisiana be worth? [Applause.] I, sir, was not born upon the soil of Louisiana, but I am her son by

adoption. [Applause.] I have spent thirty-five years, almost the half of a long life, in what I believe is honest and virtuous labor for the good of this people [Applause.] It will not be in my power to abandon this State, even though I might desire to escape the odium attaching it. My dead are here and the narrow house is already built in which after a year or two of active service I expect to be laid aside to enjoy the quiet repose which heaven has afforded to them, but before that event takes place, I desire to see this land of my adoption redeemed. [Applause.] I want her redemption to be accomplished by her own act. These beautiful plains, this delicious climate, taking the year round superior to any other upon this continent, these beautiful streams which like silver threads almost convert a portion of our State into a modern Venice—are we, sir, to abandon such a land as this, created by beneficent heaven and secured by the patriotism of the fathers that went before us? Are we to deliver, her, bound hand and foot, to such an enemy as this? [Cries of “No, no.”] Unless she be redeemed by her own act then the appeal must be made to the virtue and the intelligence of the entire country. Mr. Chairman, I need not say to one like you, so versed in moral truths, that the world is ruled by ideas, and it is not competent to any isolated community to live against the moral convictions of the world. [Applause.]

“Scarce recovered as a people from the blow inflicted upon us coming in that precise way, the moral sentiment of the world, right or wrong, was arrayed against the institution of slavery and it went down. The moral sentiment of mankind is against the lottery, and all the countries that have given it a temporary existence have found that it exhausted the resources of the land and have more or less divested themselves of the curse; but if, notwithstanding all these things, the curse should still be inflicted upon us, Louisiana must become a lost Pleiad in the sisterhood of States, and she will go forth an outcast pariah with the scarlet letter of shame branded forever upon her forehead.”

He had spoken without notes, without a line; but of an open sore that had provoked his thought and indignation for a score of years. It does not read like one of his masterpieces; but judged by the effect produced it was a great oration. Demosthenes had uttered a Philippic. The Athenians were going to fight Philip. When he declared that the partisans of the lottery, who had corrupted legislative, judicial and public morals, might drive him and his fellow citizens to the brink of the precipice, but that they would there turn and “destroy them by actual revolution,” the house cheered the bold declaration in the most enthusiastic manner. Men and women, almost the entire audience, “stood on their chairs, shouting

and gesticulating," says Dr. Wm. O. Rogers, "in a frenzy of applause and concurrence that expended itself only in successive waves of excitement." It has been said that at that moment Dr. Palmer might have turned his vast audience of intelligent and characterful people into a mob and led them, with such arms as mobs seize, against the domiciles of the lottery institution throughout the city. Certainly the audience was with him that night and would have been ready to follow whithersoever he could have led.

A distinguished Jewish Rabbi has said of this address:

"I have heard the foremost American public speakers, in the pulpit, or on the rostrum. Beecher commanded a more lurid rhetoric than Palmer. For a combination of logical argument and noble and brilliant rhetoric, neither he nor any other has equalled Palmer when *he* was at his best. I heard him that night in the Grand Opera House. Always except on this occasion, when listening to an address, even a great one, I have been able to say to myself,——, how far do you agree with the speaker? What do you reject? How far will you go with him? Where will you stop? But I give you my word, sir, that night Dr. Palmer did not permit me to think for myself, nor to feel for myself, nor to will for myself, but picked me up and carried me whithersoever he would. It did not seem to me that it was Palmer that was speaking. He spoke as one inspired. It seemed to me that God Almighty was speaking through Palmer. He had filled him with His Spirit and Message as He filled the Hebrew prophets of old."

Nor did the impression wear off. The next morning, this cultured, distinguished and able Rabbi was walking on the street. He met a man of wealth who had shown him kindness and had many lovable points of character, and who was, in the Rabbi's own words, "an all-round good fellow," but was possessed of large holdings in the lottery. After the customary salutations the Rabbi said:

"Mr. B., you had better draw out of the lottery. It is doomed."

"Why do you think so, Rabbi?" said Mr. B.

"Dr. Palmer has spoken," said the Rabbi.

"Ha! the speech of one parson cannot kill this lottery," said Mr. B.

"I repeat," said the Rabbi, "your lottery is doomed and you had better draw out."

"Pshaw! The speech of this parson cannot kill the lottery. We have the *money*."

"Once more, I say, Mr. B.," said the Rabbi, "your lottery is doomed, your holdings will soon be worthless as chaff. Not one parson has

spoken! *Ten thousand parsons have spoken!* Every man, woman, and child that heard that address last night is to-day a missionary against your lottery and its doom is as certain and as inexorable as death."

This distinguished gentleman believed that without that speech the fight would have been won by the lottery people; that it was essential to the victory of the anti-lottery crusade. The compiler of this biography does not undertake to assert this. There were other heroic men engaged in the fight. Gov. Francis T. Nicholls, Hon. E. H. Farrer, of New Orleans; Hon. Don Caffrey, of St. Mary's Parish, and Hon. John H. Stone, of East Feliciana, and other leaders of equal note, and a great host of the morally best people of the State. But it was a great thing for the good cause, that he did that night. He stood forth clothed with a character, an ability, a wisdom and an experience, proven by half a century of toil consecrated to human good and Divine glory, as a representative of the highest moral and religious forces of the State, and denounced the wrong and plead for the right, even for the redemption of his city and his people—his fellow citizens of Louisiana.

His opponents, driven to desperation, in their extremity charged him with counseling violence and threatening war. His speech itself was a sufficient answer to the charge: Revolution was counseled only as the last resort. The speech was published at once, and repeatedly, and was widely influential.

The lottery was doomed. "Conceived in the miscegenation of reconstruction, born in iniquity, sustained by a deliberate policy of bribery, an unmitigated curse to the whole country, stained with theft and the blood of many of its dupes, honest only in this, that after its large per cent of receipts was reserved for its stockholders, buyers of tickets were given the privilege of trying their luck in fortune's wheel for the balance, and the prizes won were, with blasts of trumpets, faithfully paid,"¹² this gigantic swindle was doomed. The moral sense of Louisiana had been aroused, and had issued her dictate.

To resume the cataloging of addresses made in this period: On Saturday, October 31, 1891, he delivered another notable anti-lottery address, before the Women's Anti-Lottery Mass-meeting in Tulane Hall, in which he rent the mask from the

¹² R. R. Mallard, D.D., in *Southwestern Presbyterian*, May 2, 1895, p. 4, c. 3.