

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers I*, 1885 – 1886 Oct 3, '85 to May 29, '86) The original is badly faded.

All about a Sermon by Tickler

Henry Hooper

It was a beautiful Sunday in June; the blue sky was dotted here and there with light white gossamer clouds, which faded languidly in the warm, dry air. And the fierce sun made one side of the street gutter like a lane of polished brass, and lined the opposite with changing shadow. The street am speaking about is a famous street in a nameless city.

I was standing near the celebrated Trefoil Church, on this particular Sunday morning, rumored through the land for the wealth of its members and pew owners, the sensational elegance of its pastor, and the elegant toilettes of the ladies who worshiped the shepherd. The crowd of people, who, all of them seemed to have stepped out of the tailor's fashion plate amazed me, and I was lost in either wonder or admiration at the glittering panorama, when a short, chubby-faced individual, with a music-roll under his arm ran up against, and nearly shoved me into the gutter. He commenced to rapidly apologize for his rudeness, when all at once he stopped and cried, "Hello, is that you? Jupiter Jones, who would have thought of knocking you down in the city?" and then he pushed me into a corner and almost devoured me with amazement.

I remembered him as an enthusiastic, long-haired student, when, several years ago I had found, at the Conservatorie in Leipsic and he me as the visiting friend who brought a quartette of them to the hotel, one night when they played so long and laughed so loud that the Host threatened us with the Police. I will call him Gottfried. He was the organist at the Trefoil!

After we had shaken hands with each other, and exchanged various civilities to the disgust of the policeman who had been watching us for a couple of minutes, and who looked as though he was inclined to run us in for violating the Registry Law my friend said, "Come in and hear a sermon by the great Tickler." "Pardon me," I replied, "I seldom go to church, and as for sermons, even the great Tickler's, they don't agree with me."

"What," he almost shouted, "refuse a matinee at the Trefoil? Why, this is the most [] thing in the world. People come thousands of miles to hear Tickler. Oh, I have it. Do you remember the "Ave Maria" of Cherubini [] which you said was the greatest sermon in the world? Well, here it is, arranged as a quartette. See La, de-do-do-dum. Come in old boy, we have got a quartette of voices that will make you weep." and he pulled me into the doorway and nolens volens up a narrow winding stairway which led us behind the organ, into a little gallery which stuck out like a mantle shelf in the great Trefoil. He chattered all the way. "Here is the menu, old boy. Preludum by Bach, Slona by Mozart, Offertory by Hayden, and Ave Maria by Cherubini fit for a king even though Wagner was []. "Who are your singers?" I asked.

Rorino the basso, Pastel the tenor, Illestini the soprano, and Estelle, her real name is Mulligan, the alto. You shall know them all, garlic included; and he introduced me as if I were the unerring manager of a new opera house.

There was a little curtain before our box, and we could move ourselves at pleasure, and peeped through the bottom and watch the congregation below. Rorino the bosso was striding up and down the little loft with his legs astraddle like the Boatsman on the deck of a ship. Pastel the pretty tenor, surrounded by his wife, her sister, and his mother in law was scowling at the organ because it was full of "damn wind;" while my friend was just in time to decide the dispute between the soprano and alto as whether raw egg and Madeira wine or honey and milk were the best remedy for a hoarse throat.

I took a seat on the steps of the organ and peeped down upon the congregation. It was a pretty sight below, a parterre of lovely bonnets, with the interstice filled by bald heads and black coats. After a time the creaking shoes gradually grew less, the pew doors stopped slamming, and a wave of perfume rose up from the undulating fans. The organ suddenly commenced its prelude, and then a tall giant man, dressed with extreme care passed lightly up the steps of the pulpit, shaded his face gracefully with a lace handkerchief, and then sat down wearily upon a settee.

My friend made that organ tremble and cry for ten minutes and as he pulled out a favorite stop and kicked at a couple of pedals he glanced at me triumphantly.

The singing was very good. I enjoyed it immensely; and so apparently did the congregation; for when the soprano sang her solo, the butler sexton paused in his stately walk, the preacher stopped fingering his manuscript, and even Pastel ceased chattering with his wife, her sister and his mother-in-law.

But of course the principal feature of the service was the sermon; the people settled themselves comfortably in their seats, and composed their fans with an agreeable smile of expectation. Rovino settled himself on three chairs, and even my friend opened his eyes and mouth and watched the Rev. Tickler like a cat would look at a clock. He, I mean the preacher, carefully put back a few straggling hairs from his forehead, and then shot the text at them like a bullet from a gun. This was the text as he shouted it, "Wo-0h to them that arise up early in the morning to follow ster - r - rong drink!"

This he would repeat in fifty different keys, accents and modulations, and always accompanied with suitable and changing gestures and gesticulations, so that one's eyes as well as one's ears were kept busy. You should've seen him. He looked as though he had eaten the ravens instead of being fed by them with sweet manna; and his voice would range from the imitated cooing of a pigeon to the roar of a bull. Yes indeed it did. If I could only remember all or even a half but he said.

He spoke of a Hebrew prophet, who sat upon a broken column, like an eagle upon a chalk cliff. He said that Jerusalem was larger than London, and its Temple finer and greater

than St. Peter's at Rome. And so on for one solid hour, all such tremendous assertions. By degrees I would get used to the cadence of his voice, and would drop off to sleep. Suddenly however, his rasping tones would penetrate my inmost soul, and when I opened my eyes and ears, there he was, standing on tiptoe with his long arms curved above his head, like Satan in Dore's illustration of the Paradise Lost, and he would shout, "woe - oh to Jerusalem. Wo, unutterable wo!!!"

It is not necessary to tell all he said between all those terrible shouts of woe, in the first place because I slept and in the second place because a good deal of it you can read in the newspapers every day of your life. He made some good points, that is, he scolded them fiercely. He said every house concealed a private drinking saloon, and every hat covered a drunkard, either of yesterday or tomorrow. Strong drink bloated them, painted them as red as fire engines, burned their bodies and would someday burn their souls, their immortal souls as he put it. Then he would shout, "Wo-oh to them-following strong drink-es - Wo - oh!"

I must have dozed off again, and this time dreamt that the butler sexton had looked up and detected me nodding, and that he had stolen softly up behind me, and suddenly elevated me by the hair as an example of depravity to the whole congregation, as a man that dared to sleep while Tickler preached. I woke up in a perspiration and found it was only Gottfried who was poking the music roll into my ear, and whispering, "Prepare to weep."

The Reverend Tickle was lying exhausted at the bottom of the pulpit; the ladies were wiping tears from their pretty noses, and the male portion looked at each other in triumph, and seemed to say, "Ain't he great! Ain't he a stunner!" Then came the Ave Maria. The quartette were in splendid voice, the music was pathetic and noble, and my friend on the organ performed with such pathos and feeling that it needed no imagination to fancy such a prayer would reach the dullest heart and be grateful, even to the King of Kings.

When it was over, and the congregation rose up and left the church, my friend found me in the corner blowing my nose and polishing my glasses. He was delighted; so was Rovina. "You liked dat" said the latter, "I sing for you all the time."

When we had reached the street, my friend inquired, "Well, what do you think of it?" "Beautiful, beautiful," I replied. "You mean the sermon?" "Sermon, no, the music. The sermon put me to sleep." He suddenly stopped. "What is that you say? You slept? Now let me tell you something. For five years I listen to Tickler, look at my ears; they have grown two inches in my straining after his effects. Do you know why? When I come home on Sunday my wife always ask: "Gottfried, what did Tickler say?" Well, not one word of that sermon do I remember not one word, if you were to hang me for silence."

"Well, what of it," I interrupted. "What of it? Why then my wife say, "do you know why you don't remember the sermon, Gottfried? Because you are a stupid Dutchman. Then Thunder and Blitzen dere's a row. Now, this thing must stop. Tickler must be squelched. You hear him; you have traveled; you understand English as she is spoke; you are a

thinker; and yet he preaches; and you sleep! Now you must come home with me, – by the by, nice leg of mutton and Cincinnati beer for dinner – come, you must come, and help sit down on Tickler.”

I'm ashamed to say that I entered at once into that conspiracy. The mutten was very good, so was the beer, Cincinnati beer – and then and there, to the astonishment of that blue-eyed wife of Gottfried, we sat down on Tickler. We demonstrated to that young woman that there was no comparison between a sermon by Tickler and an Ave Maria in a flat by Cherubini, one was only the noise made by the storm, the other was the mighty storm itself. And then to clinch the matter, I told her that God didn't care for the heads of men, not even for Tickler's head, but only for their hearts, and music was the language of the heart.

“Of course,” sang out Gottfried, and then we said prosit and the thing was done forever.