

ARTICLE VI.

CIVIC REFORM.¹

BY MR. Z. SWIFT HOLBROOK.

THE American people are a nation of reformers. This republic was founded by men who sought to purify the Church of England, its clergy, its members, its forms of worship, and its ordinances. This task involved the reformation of such subjects as Henry VIII., Edward VI., Bloody Mary, and Queen Elizabeth. Of course they failed. So they fled to Holland for liberty, and then came to the desolate shores of a new world. The mightiest force that landed on Plymouth Rock was the spirit of reform. This spirit formed the Massachusetts Colony; for the Pilgrims joined the Puritans, and the Plymouth Colony was augmented by some of the ablest minds and choicest spirits from England, France, and Holland. Moved by a longing for freedom; with lofty ideas of the rights of the individual; with notions of democracy that have since shaped the governments of the world; with fundamental conceptions of the duties and functions of the state,—these reformers from every land hastened to these shores that they might find room for the expression of their high ideals without opposition of church or state. No sooner had they landed than they began to reform the Indian, and this they accomplished with distinguished success by planting him in the ground. The Quakers tried their hand at reform on the Massachusetts Colony, but soon discovered that the genu-

¹ Address before the Civic and Philanthropic Conference, Battle Creek, Mich.

ine reformer does not care to be molested himself while he is busy working out his own ideals. So these "disturbers of the peace," as they were esteemed, fled to Rhode Island. Their descendants have since tried their hand at reform on President Andrews of Brown University; but, like their ancestors, have discovered that an advocate of currency reform is not himself ambitious to be reformed by methods that stifle personal liberty.

Then the Massachusetts Colony reformed a cargo of tea that landed in Boston Harbor, and this they planted, not in the ground like the Indian, but in the sea. This was revenue reform. Encouraged by this success, they next tried their hand on George III., and planted a few of his personal friends as a simple demonstration of what they could do. He decided to remain at home for his health, and just here began the great constructive period in our history as a nation. It may be asserted as a general proposition needing no proof, but simply suggestion, that the lofty ideas of civil and religious liberty, the American spirit of optimism, our institutions, our notions of democracy, are all the fruitage of a passion for reform that filled the minds and hearts of the noble men who founded this republic. This age of invention is indebted to this love for improvement and desire for perfection; for the wonderful success that has attended the attempts to annihilate space and time and reduce costs of production has its origin in the spirit of reform. A spirit of faith and of heroism accompanied with high ideals leads to overcoming difficulties and surmounting obstacles such as animate an Edison and a Bessemer.

The spirit of reform, therefore, runs in our veins, we breathe it in the air, we dig it in the soil. It is the one genuine American characteristic, as much a part of our national being as the sense of the beautiful is in the Italian, the passion for power in the Englishman, or the love of

excitement in the Frenchman. So generally has this truth come to be recognized in other nations, that the oppressed, the downtrodden, the professional agitators and disturbers of the peace, even the criminals and the cranks with wheels in their heads, the Utopian dreamers and theorists, who are never embarrassed by facts nor hampered by principles,—all such have sought this land as an asylum. They come here imagining that land may yet be preëmpted in the heart of our cities for cultivating their crazy notions and carrying out their visionary schemes. Hence with the genuine American spirit of reform that honestly and sincerely seeks better things and works for their realization, we have here in America in our larger cities the idle visions or the mouthy vaporings of the ignorant and the vicious, who lack not only a good bath but a kindergarten training in some of the simplest principles of government. Hence the sale of such books as Bellamy's "Looking Backward," Coin's "Financial School," and a host of sentimental or visionary works on fundamental questions. Herr Most and Debs are side-shows in the great menagerie of living curiosities. Currency reform, revenue reform, economic reform, the new ethic, a fine plan for a social Utopia that has never been tried anywhere, higher criticism not in theology alone but in politics and economics and ethics. The one familiar face that is not new in this gallery, is that of the old man, and he is really what most needs reforming in the entire aggregation. In other words, human nature or human beings need reforming first, and other reforms will follow, as effect follows cause.

The passion to destroy is now upon us. It is an age of destructive criticism, and our advancement in science and inventions has awakened our pride and our self-confidence. We proceed to call in question principles and truths that are as fundamental and as well established as the hills and rocks of New England. There are truths that grow not

old with the years, and will still have the bloom of youth upon their cheeks when the moon grows old, the stars grow cold, and the leaves of the judgment-book unfold. Such truths are in every realm of thought, no less than in mathematics. The world will not part with them; for the eternal years of God are theirs, like the instinct of immortality and the sense of accountability.

In summarizing the Saint-Simonian doctrines, John Stuart Mill said that society is now passing through a critical, transitional period that forms the natural prelude to a new order. The Saint-Simonians divided the history of the human race into organic and critical periods. "The period of Greek or Roman polytheism, so long as really believed in by instructed Greeks and Romans, was an organic period, succeeded by the critical or skeptical period of the Greek philosophers. Another organic period began with Christianity. The corresponding critical period began with the Reformation, has lasted ever since, still lasts, and cannot altogether cease until a new organic period has been inaugurated by the triumph of a yet more advanced creed."¹

What shall be the creed of the new century upon whose threshold we now stand? We are near enough to catch through the open window the breath of its springtime with its opening buds and awakening life.

The seventeenth century was literary, the eighteenth was theological, the nineteenth has been scientific, will the twentieth be sociological? Man in his social aspects is to receive the profoundest study. We have studied the state from the standpoint of individual rights; now the individual must be studied in his relations to society. What Mrs. Humphrey Ward calls the New Reformation is to open the eyes of the people to the social sciences. Individualism must again be weighed in the balances, its true limi-

¹ Mill's Autobiography, pp. 163-164.

tations defined; the duties and functions of the state must be put in the crucible. The result must be to create a fashion of thought, a public opinion founded on principles of right and justice that have been verified; to awaken the social conscience; to quicken the social sensibilities, giving new direction to the social will, higher ideals of citizenship, a nobler sense of obligation and duty to the state. This must be a nearer approach to an ideal social condition. The result must be civic righteousness and, therefore, civic reform.

Will not this new reformation be shaped by what has been? Shall we abandon the historical, the inductive, for the speculative, the philosophical, or the visionary? Has the past no lessons of value for the present? Suppose the founders of this republic were individualists, must we go to the other extreme and adopt state socialism for a part of our creed? What if they did leave the ninety and nine and come to this wilderness to find that lost sheep, individualism, shall we again let it go astray because we are now interested in the ninety and nine? They brought home rejoicing that which was lost, even if it was an exaggeration to make such an ado over it. If we lose sight of individualism, we shall have again the unsolvable problem of how to make a social paradise out of individual sinners; how to create a perfect whole out of imperfect units. Herbert Spencer has said that the type of society is determined by the character of its units. The retail work of reforming individuals must always continue; for this is as divine a plan for doing it as at wholesale, as Mr. B. Fay Mills has found by experience. Civic righteousness is accumulated individual righteousness; the public conscience is the accumulated conscience of individuals and, as superior atoms attract the smaller, it is often the conscience of the few. The basis of true civic reform must be an enlightened purpose on the part of the many to attain the ideal of citizen-

ship such as both Athens and Sparta sought. Athens approached it through deifying the intellect, Sparta through deifying the will. Both the intelligence and the purpose are involved in such a culture, and their harmony must be emphasized; for righteousness is the harmony of the will with the reason. The founders of this republic understood all this, for, as the late Dr. Poole wrote: "This zeal for education prompted the people of Massachusetts to found a college before they were yet free from the perils of starvation, and to establish a complete system of free schools before the first generation in the new home had passed the age of childhood."

There is nothing more dangerous in a government like our own than ignorance on fire. Zeal without knowledge is fanaticism, and religion can lay no claim to a monopoly of that article. It is a product of the simplest manufacture in every realm of thought and action. Sinners may be men of bad purposes or they may be uneducated men. Malevolence is no more productive of evil in the world than is ignorance. To change men's wills and then to shape their thought is the task of both church and college. Eliminate then from the problem the vicious elements of society who care not for truth or fact, what simple truths demand public attention and emphasis that the right of franchise may be exercised with intelligence. What few mountain-peak truths, so simple and self-evident that the instincts adopt them before they pass into the examining-room of the reason, must have a search-light turned upon them, and be held up before the people as the way, the truth, and the life in a democracy like our own?

Those truths are these: 1. A clear apprehension of what are the natural rights of man; and 2. What are the duties and functions of the state. This involves an inquiry as to the nature of liberty, the rights of property, a study of socialism, and duties to the state. Text-books in the com-

mon schools should set forth in simple language these fundamentals. The day-laborer and the wage-earner, it is said, cannot spend time for an inquiry so technical into the mysteries of ethics, economics, politics, and religion. But this is just what is coming in American politics. We have had one election depending on a technical question in finance; the next election may turn on the merits of state socialism; it may involve a study of government by injunction; it may demand campaign literature on the nature of liberty. The common people cannot be educated in our universities; for they enjoy so few of the natural rights of man, that they are simply struggling to stay on earth. Their children are taken out of school at an early age and before the really practical studies are entered upon. How then shall they be educated? It must be done through the daily press, the clubs for the discussion of social questions, the pulpits and the penny literature, but most of all in the standards of manhood and womanhood that are silently adopted in every community. Some of the noblest men and women are in the humblest walks of life. It is a serious question in fact, if within a century our universities will not be estranged from the common people. If they are the servile patrons of plutocracy or the sycophants of a shoddy aristocracy; if they adopt false ideals or worship superficial success, they will degenerate into a scholasticism worse than mediæval, that will make their abolition a political necessity or their reformation a religious duty. All the stars in their course fight for the common people; and history will repeat itself in the American republic if our universities are dominated by the uncrowned kings who rule the marts of trade, and hold us all in their iron grasp by cornering the markets on the necessities of life. These are the criminals of to-day. They are found by the score at the convocations of every university, and their garments smell of coffee, salt, sugar, beef,

matches, iron, and oil. They are the enemies of this republic, and their education on earth has simply been neglected. Ordinarily it is completed in the penitentiary. Until we have found a way to punish these criminals, our republic is in danger, for the people are aroused. They rob the widows and orphans, and for a pretense make long prayers. Corporations, trusts, and combines to-day engage the finest executive ability and the ablest legal talent in the land. These men associate with college presidents, bank presidents, ministers of the gospel, and create a fashion of thought in their favor. Legislatures are controlled, courts of justice influenced, and all the conservative elements made to become their defenders by reason of their success in acquisition, not because of their justice. If the false standards of excellence exalted by such men are what exalt a nation, then the lowly Nazarene was wanting in every element of prudence and wisdom. Success is the one word that to-day covers a multitude of sins. When they shall control the centers of learning, the beginning of the end is near. Tocqueville said that liberty cannot be established without morality, nor morality without faith. These are the faithless members of society, no less than our anarchists. These are the disturbers of the peace, the breeders of revolution, the enemies of the social order. The legislative, the executive, and the judicial are in danger from their influence, and our seats of learning must not be disgraced by their gifts nor molded by their influence. Let us beware when law becomes a farce, and the whole people are imbued with a contempt for court.

The wholesome tendency in this day to consolidation, aggregation, combination, and coöperation must not be confused for an instant with the misuse of such beneficent power. The use and abuse of the corporation; the prostituting to personal ends for purposes of greed and the gratification of such a selfish lust of power as is shown in the

combines that keep up the prices of commodities by limiting production, must find no apologists under the guise of benevolent coöperation. Senator Lexow's committee discovered that the United States Rubber Trust, in order to increase the prices of rubber goods, ordered the closing of the Goodyear, Woonsocket, and Colchester factories, throwing over a thousand men out of employment for nine months of the year. It is such trusts that the people complain of, and rightly; and the courts must find a way to enforce the laws against such criminals. Men who form such combines are criminals under the statutes of most of our States, and are classed with the vicious members of society. If the defense of trusts by Ex-Governor Roswell P. Flower includes such combines as this, his words with the common people will have no weight; for the time is surely coming when the descendants of men who have acquired unjustly will be as apologetic of their names as are the descendants of Benedict Arnold, or as those of Wilkes Booth would have been if he had left any.

Hon. Chauncey M. Depew, in his address at Nashville University, in speaking of the development of our great railway systems, paid high and just tribute to such organizing power and ability as the late Commodore Vanderbilt possessed. He then passed on to a eulogy of corporate power in these words:—

“After years of controversy, of hostile legislation, of corporate abuses and their correction, both by law and by investors, the necessity for the combination of the capital of the many into the corporation to carry on enterprises involving vast sums to build and operate was recognized, and the temperate judgment of the time has accepted the situation by placing corporations under proper governmental supervision and control. Admiration for self-made men of great riches has turned to deep distrust of accumulated wealth, and yet the number of such people is now so large that it would be impossible for any one to wield the power for good or evil which was common a generation ago.

“The agitator ignores the resistless strength of universal suffrage and forgets or denies the experience of the past. The same sense of justice

and capacity for government which has impelled the people to minimize the dangers and increase the benefits of corporations will seize and solve in the best interests of the country the problem of combinations and trusts."

Mr. Depew is surely aware of the violations of law, and the evils attending the misuse of corporate power, on the part of men of wealth of to-day. But he finds no word of censure for this. He has eyes but sees not.

Secretary Lyman J. Gage, one of the most evenly balanced and fairest-minded men in America, whom to know is not only to admire but to love, in his Peoria address paid high and appreciative tribute to men of wealth and executive ability, but had this to say of unjust acquisition:—

"Lest I be misunderstood, let me hasten to admit that while honorable wealth can be acquired only by giving service of equal or greater value to society, in too many instances wealth, great wealth, is acquired where the service rendered in return is very inadequate, where foresightedness and ability, perceiving the enormous value of natural opportunities, in municipal privileges, such as water, gas or street railways, make thrifful bargains with corrupt or ignorant representatives of the people, to take up and monopolize to their own aggrandizement the rights which inhere in all of the people. It may, however, be pleaded in abatement of even this one-sided operation that it is better that these natural opportunities should be thus exploited than to have them remain inert and unavailed of.

"The service which ought to be rendered in the acquisition of wealth is wholly lacking, when it is secured by sharp and inequitable practices, such as were recently illustrated by some who, in a position to seize the opportunity, made enormous importations of goods and wares, not to supply the reasonable and ordinary needs of their trade, but in order to anticipate and take over to themselves the revenues which Congress was endeavoring to secure for the good of all. There was no law against it, but there is a public conscience against it, and in the development of a right public opinion, a clean public conscience, lies the best promise of a cure for these abuses.

"Frequent as they may be, the effect of these parasitical invasions upon the great body of wealth, produced by the joint or separate mal-action of enterprise, capital and labor, is relatively small."

Judge Robert A. Van Wyck, the newly elected mayor of New York, said this of trusts:—

"The efforts of trusts, of monopolies, of combinations, whether cor-

porate or private, to control trade, choke competition, and fleece the citizens by false high prices will be withstood and beaten down."

If this promise is carried out, then with all its faults Tammany will do the public an inestimable service. The McKinley administration must not underestimate the deep feeling of the people on this subject; for the silver question and the tariff may be side-issues in the next campaign. If Mr. Hanna said in the Senate Committee that the Republican party had paid its debt to the trusts, and unless it had done so it would have no funds for the next campaign, the public knowledge of such a statement would defeat in 1900 any party that became sponsor for it.

Civic reform needs no educating impulse at this point.

With our universities unfettered and the daily press free and intelligent, the people can be educated in the fundamentals of good government. The natural rights of man, which are life, liberty, property, and reputation, will demand a rehearing. What is true liberty? What are the rights of property? Are the trusts and monopolies of today justified in their existence or methods? Are they servants or parasites? Such questions as these will determine Presidential elections in the next century.

The majority of voters must be made to see that liberty is not freedom for the individual to think, act, and worship as he pleases, irrespective of the rights of others. To act as we please unless we please to do right is to trespass. Liberty hath its boundaries and its relations to law, otherwise it becomes license. It is not a wandering comet or the lost Pleiad, but an orderly, law-abiding planet, revolving in its own orbit, subject to the laws of the universe. The only liberty that is worthy of the name is born of bondage to truth or to law. The people need to know and to understand this momentous truth. It would seem a hopeless task when such popular and charming writers as W. D. Howells affirm that liberty is incompatible with

poverty, that freedom involves a means of livelihood. Senator Hoar said: "God giveth to liberty nothing but victory." Mr. Howells could scarcely substitute his equivalent in such an equation and have it prove. The right to own and bequeath are corollaries of the right to life and liberty. The rights of property are now at war on the rights of man, and hence the question of property rights must again come up before the people for a careful hearing.

The duties and functions of the state must also be clearly defined, for this may yet be an issue in a political campaign. The people must know that there are a few things the state cannot do. It cannot make people honest, industrious, and thrifty, and therefore contented and happy. It cannot make men equal except before the law. It cannot bring real equality except through liberty. It cannot change the nature of things. If individualism is suppressed, it will assert itself in some new form; for, as Lieber says, "The individual stands higher than the state."

If we press the view of man in his individual aspects till we lose sight of the state, we have anarchism, a denial of the right of government. The social condition becomes a voluntary, not a natural compact, from which the individual may withdraw when he pleases, and whose obligations he may cancel at will. This is individualism gone to seed, and a Robinson Crusoe or a Selkirk are the only persons in a position to justify such a theory or enjoy its blessings.

If we press the view of man in his social aspects till we lose sight of the individual, we have socialism, a denial of the rights of the individual, an overestimate of the duties and functions of the state, an attempt to make a perfect whole out of imperfect units. A perfect social condition demands perfect units. Falsehood and error may be simply want of perspective; and this is revealed nowhere more clearly than in the imperfect, hazy, or one-sided views of man and his relations to the state that the ignorant and

vicious members of society in these days are trying to enforce.

THE STATE

is not a voluntary compact. It is as divine in its origin as the creation or evolution of man. Its existence is not sanctioned by arbitrary fiat, by motives of convenience or of selfishness; but by the very law of man's being. Each individual is, in himself, a state in embryo.

When men associate themselves together, these state germs in the individual spring into life and the new relations create new laws. Human laws simply photograph and express these new relations and the enforcement of these laws demands government. This involves expense, and expense demands revenue. Hence the rise of the entire system of taxation. The right of the state to tax is a vital and supreme fact in its existence. Its source of life and efficiency, without which there could be no state.

INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS

are meaningless, except as the state guarantees them; for in being taxed a man gives up but a tithe, in order that what remains may have tenfold more value. Hence it is no sacrifice, but a wise investment. The ancient idea was that the individual is zero, the state is all. The New England idea reversed the equation, and made the individual everything, the state his servant. The truth must include both poles of thought.

Civic reform must come by education and evolution,—not by revolution. It does not win a game of chess to kick over the board. That is anarchy. And especially is this an important truth since we have opened the flood-gates to foreign paternalism. Upon a heterogeneous mass of foreign ignorance and prejudice we have bestowed the right of franchise without property or educational test. Without education every sort of a crazy theory will be seriously pro-

posed for adoption by the people, and no theory has yet been enunciated too absurd to find advocates. Wrong notions of property, of taxation, of liberty, of the province of government, spring, full grown, from the heads of idle dreamers, like the snakes from the head of Medusa. Every kind of an eccentric motion can be found in such an intellectual workshop.

The perils of civic reform are many, but so are its beneficent results. It is said that Queen Victoria looks with apprehension on the future of America. The safety of this republic is in the intelligence and the faith of its masses who elect the legislature, create the judiciary and executive. While the will of a community, its intelligence, its ethical standards and ideals, must be sought back in the persons who comprise that community, yet the combined strength is a social will, a public enlightenment, a public conscience, a public opinion that itself helps to shape the thought and mold the characters of the many. The logic of these is beneficent laws, Christian customs and manners, a public virtue that cannot be debauched because it is the result of accumulated private virtues.

Absolute justice must be the basis of a Christian society, and a community that is not so founded may have enlightenment, may have a form of culture, a certain type of piety even, but it is not Christian. The state is founded on justice; and if Christian faith cannot produce that in its citizens it cannot produce a benevolence that is worthy of the name, for it is synonymous with sentimentalism. It is not the duty of the state to attempt to make its citizens happy by adopting some economic theory that has never been practiced; nor by abolishing private property; nor by distributing equally to the just and unjust; nor by restricting the free play of true individualism; nor by taxing the successful and the prosperous unjustly to feed the drones and the sluggards of society; nor by becoming a religious teacher

or a paternal guardian, thus relieving the individual from the necessity of personal and heroic virtues like honesty, industry, and thrift. But it is the duty of the Christian state to throw its protecting arms about the humblest and the poorest; to shield the weak from the strong; to permit any man, no matter how lowly and despised, to be the equal before the law of any other man, however rich and powerful; to see that each one has the right to labor and to enjoy the fruits of his labor, provided always that his efforts be put forth with due regard to the rights of others; to keep from starvation those who are mentally or physically unable to work; in short, to guard the individual in the possession of his natural rights. And this means that if society is between two malefactors,—organized capital that is warring on the rights of the individual, and organized labor that denies to the non-union man the right to labor, then the state must solve that problem with an iron hand, or that problem will dissolve the state.

Christianity is not simply the science of manhood and womanhood; it is the science of statehood; it is the art of social control; it is the true philosophy of government.

In its very genius, it gives free play to the highest individualism, the educated reason moved by a regenerated will; for, as Kant says: "Of all things that can possibly be conceived, one thing alone can be called perfectly good, and that is a good will." Good will is the characteristic of a good citizen because it is the keynote of civic virtue, of sound economics, clean politics, no less than of Christian faith. Hence the light of the Christian religion must now be concentrated upon social problems, and its life must be spent in the attainment of just social conditions.