

ARTICLE VII.

THE ETHICAL FACTOR IN POLITICS.

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THERE is an intimate relationship between politics and commerce. So much political activity has its motive in business considerations that the financial factor seems, on the surface, to be the dominant factor in politics. So obtrusive has been this factor in our own national history that a brilliant United States Senator dared a few years ago to say that the Golden Rule and the Ten Commandments had no place in American politics. He was speaking not of theories but of actual conditions as he interpreted them.

Nevertheless a look beneath the surface both of history and of present conditions finds strong ground for the conviction expressed in the following proposition: The ethical factor has been and is now increasingly the most potent one in politics.

It was comparatively early in the history of modern civilization that the tyranny of kings found its only effective buttress in the claim to a "divine right." The inspiration moving the barons to make the stand at Runnymede that wrested from King John the Great Charter of English liberties sprang less from the consciousness of their might than from the impelling sense that right was on their side. It was John Wycliffe's proclamation through a translated Bible and an army of Lollards of the doctrine of a common fatherhood and an all-inclusive brotherhood that started the political earthquake

causing British absolutism first to tremble on its throne and later to totter to its fall in the days of Cromwell and Charles the First.

The whole modern ferment making for civil liberty and now beginning to convulse the Eastern nations, as in former generations it has revolutionized the Western, is everywhere traceable to the ethical yeast. It is this ethical yeast, as Benjamin Kidd has shown in his "Social Evolution" and in his later work entitled "Western Civilization," that has been the chief evolutionary principle in political progress.

It is not infrequently said that the "Compact" drawn up by the Pilgrims in the cabin of the Mayflower has had more far-reaching political effects than any other document penned in modern times. Whether that be an extravagant assertion or not it is plainly demonstrable that "the tap-root of all that is wholesome and permanent in modern democracy" is sunk in the very soil out of which that compact grew. An element of the same spirit that impelled the Pilgrims and the Puritans to break away from the English shores prompted their descendants in "seventy-six" to break away from the British government. It was not so much because taxation without representation was expensive as because it was unjust that they waged a war so costly in money and in blood.

Later another war was waged on American soil. When the first gun was fired at Fort Sumter it was popularly supposed that Cotton was king. When, four years later, the dove of peace finally alighted at Appomattox, it had been demonstrated that the ethical principle of human freedom sat on a loftier throne.

The modern sociologist, studying history and society in his scientific laboratory, is now announcing that "the ruling class ordering the world to their own ends are everywhere en-

countering a process that is gradually subordinating their selfish ends to something higher." In this encounter absolute monarchy has gone down in the West and is trembling in the East, slavery is making its last stand in the Congo wilds and commercialism is now brought to bay on the great industrial battle-field. All the political developments of the past are but consecutive pages in the text-book from which the world is slowly learning the great lesson of history that "selfishness is disintegrating and dangerous—that selfishness and any system inspired by selfishness ultimately falls of its own weight." The time has past in Anglo-Saxon history when the great political problems centered around royal selfishness. To-day our greatest political problems center about social and commercial selfishness.

Our race problems are at bottom moral problems, and will never reach a solution till they are settled in conformity with the fundamental principles of ethics. Our labor problem, complicated as it appears, is simply a question of fair dealing between man and man. The problem of trusts has its economic as well as its ethical features, but there is no momentum in the material considerations involved powerful enough to unseat tyrannous capitalism. From one side of the trough goes up the shriek, "I want my share!" From the other side shrills the answer, "You are getting more than your share!" They are two squeals, but they come from the same breed of hogs. This situation is enough to insure a fight, but it insures no victory for either side. Here was the fatal inadequacy of the French Revolution. The dominating ethical element essential to real progress and to final solutions was lacking in the body politic. But when up from the multitude there rumbles the cry concerning any controlling influence, "It is unjust! It is wrong!" then at last you have a movement that is ominous;

for if it gathers weight and speaks with the tone of moral conviction it means doom to the power at which it is aimed, however armed and entrenched that power may be.

When the cry of "discrimination" is raised between shippers and railroads, if it only means, "Give me my turn at the trough," the great voting public will not give attention long enough to accomplish lasting results; but if a clamorous cry goes up, "This is tyrannous—it is not a square deal for all," and the resulting inquiry demonstrates that there is truth in the charge, then an irresistible political movement has begun.

Let it be known that the political grafter, the insurance magnate, the waterer of stocks, has been running amuck among the Ten Commandments, call his offense by the plain name of stealing, and the Folk or the Hughes who does it passes into office at the next election on the indignant votes of his fellow-citizens. The railroads will no longer kill fifteen thousand people a year when the great common people, whom you cannot fool all the time, attaches the ethical name of "murder" to the willful neglect of roadbeds and of safety appliances, and to the requiring of trainmen to work continuously seven days in the week and sometimes seventeen hours in the day.

Theories offered in explanation of the present financial flurry are legion. There is significance because more than a little truth in the answer of a famous correspondent of the *Philadelphia Press* to the question "What hit Wall Street?" when he asserts that it was the faith of the common people in honesty and justice coming, through the avenue of politics, up against the leagued gamblers entrenched in their towering castles of speculation.

Organized greed, which has long waged victorious political

warfare by simply blowing the trumpet of the particular political party seeming to be most powerful or most amenable to its "special interest," is nearly panic-stricken by the discovery that the snap of the party whip is fast losing its old-time terror, and a political factor of comparatively recent origin, known as "the independent voter," is to hold the balance of power in the immediate future.

The recent November elections afford startling intimation that he may already be succeeding both Democrat and Republican as the dominant agency in American politics. Independent voting resulted in Massachusetts in such a defection from the Democratic party as to threaten its official standing; in New York City in the repudiation of the fusion between the Republican party and the Independence League; in Louisville in the overthrow of what would normally be a Democratic city government; in Salt Lake City in the election of the American instead of the hitherto successful Mormon Republican candidate; in San Francisco in the election of Dr. Taylor as mayor over a combination of the reigning Republican machine and many labor unionists.

And who is the independent voter? In general he is the man who votes for the principle that he believes is right and for the candidate that he believes is honest. It is true that his ranks are often swelled by those taking the side that they think will best serve their selfish interest; but he is the hope of the future because by a large majority he is the man who is more influenced by ethical considerations than by party name.

This surmounting of the moral element over the partisan element in politics is the outgrowth of a mighty principle that, in the evolution of society, is fast emerging into clear view. It is already discernible to the forthlooking vision, whether

it be contemplating national or international relations, that the rivalry of the future is to be between great opposing systems of social order, the determining factor of success being the degree to which the highest ethical principles have been adopted.

This line of cleavage has one of its many illustrations in the gigantic strides now making in the prohibition of promiscuous liquor-selling until half the territory of the United States is under prohibitory law, with prospect of sweeping and resistless progress in the near future. Nobody can sanely doubt that this already stupendous political edifice, so rapidly adding story to story, rests upon the bedrock of a great moral conviction. The organized traffic is finally recognizing that its gigantic corruption fund is powerless to arrest the movement, and that—because, even in the political arena, money, though it be martialled in endless battalions, cannot stand against an aroused moral sentiment.

It constitutes one of the distinct signs of the times when a popular United States senator tours the country delivering to applauding audiences numbering thousands a lecture with the title "The Public Virtue a Question of Politics," and asserting from the standpoint of the statesman-politician that "the most serious perils besetting our institutions are moral perils," and that "democracy requires for its life fidelity to right living."

If the pulpit of the present day is losing its relative pre-eminence in moral leadership it is because the political paper and the political stump are stealing its thunder. Among the two most effective preachers of righteousness at the present time—certainly the most widely heard—are the president of the United States and the opposing party's most popular candidate for president. I have seen the report of a gentleman

who heard Governor Hughes's most recent political address. He affirms that the parts of the speech which were most applauded were the parts which were most like preaching; that his appeal was distinctly moral and his affirmations emphatically ethical in substance. Can there be any intelligent dissent from the judgment which this "onlooker" expresses when he avers that no man can get the grip on the public which President Roosevelt has, which Mr. Bryan manages to hold, and to which Mr. Hughes has come so quietly and so quickly, unless there is in him something of moral leadership?

All this signifies that there is an undercurrent of assent in the popular mind to Senator Dolliver's proposition that the public virtue is a question of politics. While the American people do not, and never will, believe that it is any part of civil government to save men's souls, or that intrinsic moral character can, in the nature of things, be produced by legislative enactment, they have, nevertheless, detected the fallacy that lurks in the oft-quoted aphorism "You cannot make men moral by act of parliament." They are rapidly learning by actual experience that law enactment and law enforcement working harmoniously do in actuality promote public morals, and check, and even in good measure repress, certain obtrusive forms of immorality.

It is a long-accepted and fundamental principle of law that the safety of the public morals is a primary concern of government. The officials and courts of various states have alleged this as the ground of their decision against lotteries and prize-fights. The Kansas Supreme Court in the case of *Kansas vs. Ziebold and Habelin*, 123 U. S. Rep. 623-662, alleged, as one of the grounds of its decision, that "*public morals . . . may be endangered by the general use of intoxicating drinks.*"

The United States Supreme Court has repeatedly averred that "no legislature can bargain away the public morals," adding, in the case of *Stone vs. Miss.* that "the people themselves cannot do it, much less their servants." Following the same principle, familiar to jurisprudence since the days of the Justinian Code and similarly expressed by many of our highest tribunals, the highest court of the State of New York, the Court of Appeals, has said: "Sound morality is the corner-stone of the social edifice. Whatever disturbs that is condemned under the fundamental rule."

In a country with such a spirit as we have been tracing supreme among the people, and with such a principle as that outlined above regnant in its fundamental law, what is to be the future political attitude toward unnecessary Sunday labor and toward professional pleasure-venders holding public spectacles for pay on the Sabbath-day? The history of civilization has demonstrated that the decalogue lies at the foundation of the social structure, and that the law of a weekly day for physical rest and moral and spiritual refreshment is as inherent in the very constitution of human nature as either of the other nine. "Since," as Froude expresses it, "our human laws are but copies more or less imperfect of the eternal laws as far as we can read them," enactments for the preservation of the Sabbath have gone upon civil statute-books and been repeatedly confirmed by civil courts; and since the trend of civil government is steadily toward increasing accord with the ethical standards of immutable law, we may be confident that the future will see both the enactment and the enforcement of such laws not diminished but augmented.

The state need not be violently agitated when a group of boys play a Sunday game in a secluded lot, or a family party indulge in festivities out of harmony with Sabbath sanctities

in a private house, but when great throngs gather in public places to support a continuous institution the motive for whose maintenance on the part of professional players and actors and their financial backers is purely a business motive residing in gate receipts and ticket money, then the safety of the day involving the public welfare is at stake.

There is in some quarters the need of a reminder that, while under our form of government the state has no alliance with churches as ecclesiastical organizations, it cannot afford not to welcome, and in decisions of its highest legal tribunals it has welcomed, the aid of religion in its function of fostering public safety through maintaining and promoting public morality. The state is not allied to the church; but it is the privilege and duty of the state to see to it that the church shall have a fair chance in ministering to the moral education of the people, which, especially in a democracy, is so essential to the perpetuity of the state itself. Indeed, it is now widely and gravely questioned whether the state should be expected to furnish the moral education adequate for citizenship, and whether it should not assume, if not invite, the coöperation of the institutions of religion in that department of public education. It might, therefore, even be claimed that the state is serving directly her own interest if on one day in the week she preserves for the church the right of way to the attention of the people.

This digression led us away from a reference to Sunday theaters. If, now, it be a principle of civil law that the state "cannot bargain away the public morals," then, even on those days when the theater is licensed to run, the state has a right and a duty to interfere with the presentations of the stage that afford a morbid stimulus to crime or distinctly and flagrantly promote immorality by inflaming lustful appetite.

The foregoing may serve as specimens of the truth that there is yet unworked ore in that vein of civil prerogative which Blackstone touches in his definition of municipal law, as "a rule of civil conduct prescribed by the supreme power in a state commanding what is right and prohibiting what is wrong."

Politics has been inaptly called a game. It may be more exactly characterized as a warfare, in which there are the two forever contending forces—right and wrong. The battle-front fluctuates, now yielding, now advancing, but in the progress of our Anglo-Saxon civilization the changing location of the firing-line has moved steadily onward from one abandoned outpost to another before the superior might of right. Greed, graft, mere financial self-interest win skirmishes and temporary advantages. Moral principle wins all the decisive battles, which mark the permanent stages of political progress.

As it is the victorious general who is remembered, so the politicians who occupy a high niche in history's wall are the leaders who were on the right side of great moral issues. There are still corrupt men in politics, but it is reassuring to consider what ethical standards of character are generally recognized as essential to fitness for high public office.

This article began with Senator Ingalls's cynical reference to the decalogue and the Golden Rule. It shall end with a more recent mention of them by another political leader, whose remarkable influence in this nation is preëminently a moral influence. Says President Roosevelt, "Our whole movement is simply and solely to make the decalogue and the Golden Rule of some practical moment in the business life of the community."