

The Commoner.

WILLIAM J. BRYAN, EDITOR AND PROPRIETOR

VOL. 9, NO. 4

Lincoln, Nebraska, February 5, 1909

Whole Number 420

THE PRICE OF A SOUL

BY W. J. BRYAN

Address delivered at the commencement exercises of the Pierce School, Philadelphia, Pa., December 23, 1908.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:

The interrogatory has ever been recognized by orators as a forcible method of presenting an argument, and illustrations of it can be found in nearly all the great speeches of the world. Christ, whose utterances are not surpassed in clearness and in power, used the interrogatory with telling effect, and he used it in the presentation of the greatest subject that can engage the attention of a human being. I offer no apology for bringing before a graduating class the startling question in which the Master focuses attention upon a tremendous theme, "What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" Holding the scales in His hand, He weighs the soul against all things else. Who will dispute the correctness of His estimate, or challenge the righteousness of the judgment which He pronounces?

Think not that the question is an unimportant one, or that Christ was dealing with a sentimental subject. Some have sought to brush aside the teachings of the man of Galilee as visionary, but no other philosophy is so practical as His; no other code of morals so harmonizes with human experience, or so completely diagrams a noble life.

Christ never spoke thoughtlessly; He never dealt with trifles, or with things insignificant. His words are full of meaning, and to those who, having completed their preparation, are about to enter upon the serious work of life, no more weighty thought, no more searching question, could be presented than this which deals with the soul.

In choosing this theme I am not invading the domain of the minister of the gospel. It is a mistake to suppose that this is merely a Sabbath day subject. Every day the individual has an opportunity—aye, is called upon—to place a price upon the soul, for he is every day tempted to barter it away for something which, for the moment, may seem more desirable. In fact, character is formed by resistance to these temptations; the character is good just in proportion as the interests of the soul are preferred to that which is offered in exchange for it. The soul shrivels when it is treated as merchandise.

I am not stating a new truth when I state that the interests of the soul are paramount. Socrates, in presenting a defense of his conduct, declared that in obedience to God he was

accustomed to address the Athenians and ask: "Are you not ashamed of being careful for riches, how you may acquire them in greatest abundance, and for glory and honor, but care not, nor take any thought for wisdom and truth, and for your soul, how it may be made most perfect?" If that ancient sage was able to thus accurately measure the worth of the soul, can we excuse ignorance of its value in this day and generation? If he was barely convicted in that early day for teaching that man's immortal interests are superior to temporal blessings, can we forgive ourselves, or be forgiven, if we ignore so great a truth as that presented by the Nazarene?

Let me briefly enumerate some of the ways in which this temptation approaches us. He who for truth's sake drank the deadly hemlock, had observed that riches sometimes benumb the better impulses, and he, therefore, put riches first in the question which he propounded on the streets of Athens. You will find that more of your temptations will come from a desire to get rich quick than from any other source.

How much wealth can one rightfully acquire? As much, be that amount great or small, as measures the service which he renders to society. If one is limited to less than that he feels that he has been wronged; if he consciously acquires more than that, he can not escape the conviction that he has defrauded some one, and it destroys one's self respect to continue in conscious wrong-doing.

How much wealth should one desire? Only so much as he can wisely use. We need food and clothing and shelter, but there is a limit to each. We must have the food necessary to strengthen the body for its work, but we can not go much beyond this limit without injury to ourselves. We need clothing, but our needs in this respect are moderate, and one has but a poor conception of the value of time if he employs it all in changing his raiment. We need shelter, but here, too, we can not greatly exceed our needs without multiplying our cares. We need education, and yet education is a means to an end, and in pursuing it, we must be mindful of the fact that education is not to be used like an ornament, to gratify one's vanity, but to increase one's capacity for service. Money can be spent in traveling, and yet traveling can be over-done; unless it results in a benefit that can be communicated to others, it may cost more than it is worth. One may acquire money in order to give it to some cause or institution that deserves support, but it is often better to give one's self than to give any amount of money.

Man is a social being. He needs the companionship of others, and money may enable him to meet legitimate social demands, but there is nothing more empty than a life devoted entirely to social enjoyment; no investment yields a smaller dividend in happiness than years wholly consumed in gratifying a social ambition.

Let money be your servant rather than your master. Some are stronger than others and can carry a heavier load; some can possess more money than others and yet remain the owners of their money; others with less money may allow themselves to become subservient to the dollar. No one can afford to acquire enough money, even though he acquires it honestly, to change this relation between the money and the man. The love of money is still the "root of all evil;" and the man who is dominated by this passion is not only useless to society, but is, in the end, contemptible and miserable. In the parable of the Sower we learn that even nineteen hundred years ago, "the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches" choked the truth. The indictment stands today, and every generation presents many visible evidences of this cruel fact.

Love of money has a multitude of ways in

which it works the demoralization of those whom it rules. It manifests itself in every occupation and profession—alas, even the calling furnishes no sure protection against it. Let me illustrate what I mean by referring to some of the more important spheres of activity.

Take the occupation in which I am engaged, journalism. It presents a great field—a growing field; in fact, there are few fields so large. The journalist is both a news gatherer and a moulder of thought. He informs his readers as to what is going on, and he points out the relation between cause and effect—interprets current history. Public opinion is the controlling force in a republic, and the newspaper gives to the journalist, beyond every one else, the opportunity to affect public opinion. Others reach his readers through the courtesy of the newspaper, but the owner of the paper has full access to his own columns, and does not fear the blue pencil. The journalist occupies the position of a watchman upon a tower. He is often able to see dangers which are not observed by the general public, and because he can see these dangers he is in a position of greater responsibility. Is he discharging the duty which superior opportunity imposes upon him? I might mention a number of temptations which come to the journalist but I shall content myself with a few. First, there is the temptation to conceal the name of the real owner of the paper. The proprietor of a paper should be known, but his identity is not always disclosed. The corporate entity which plays so large a part in the business world has entered the newspaper field. The names of the stockholders are not published and we do not always know what individuality directs the paper's policy. Year by year the disclosures are bringing to light the fact that the predatory interests are using the newspapers and even the magazines, for the defense of commercial iniquity and for the purpose of attacking those who lift their voices against favoritism and privilege. A financial magnate interested in the exploitation of the public secures control of a paper; he employs business managers, managing editors and a reportorial staff. He does not act openly or in the daylight but through a group of employes who are the visible but not the real directors. The reporters are instructed to bring in the kind of news which will advance the enterprises owned by the man who stands back of the paper and if the news brought in is not entirely satisfactory it is doctored in the office. The columns of the paper are filled with matter, written not for the purpose of presenting facts as they exist but for the purpose of distorting facts and misleading the public. The editorial writers, whose names are generally unknown to the public, are told what to say and what subjects to avoid. They are instructed to extol the merits of those who are subservient to the interests represented by the paper, and to misrepresent and traduce those who dare to criticize or oppose the plans of those who hide behind the paper. Such journalists are members of a kind of "Blackhand society;" they are assassins, hiding in ambush and striking in the dark; and the worst of it is that the readers have no way of knowing when a change takes place in the ownership of such a paper. Editorial poison, like other poisons, can be administered more successfully if the victim is in ignorance as to who administers it.

There are degrees of culpability and some are disposed to hold an editorial writer guiltless even when they visit condemnation upon the secret director of the paper's policy. I present to you a different—and I believe higher—ideal of journalism. If we are going to make any progress in morals we must abandon the idea that morals are defined by the statutes; we must recognize that there is a wide margin between that which the law prohibits and that which an enlightened conscience can approve.

CONTENTS

THE PRICE OF A SOUL

NOT THE TREATMENT FOR HEROES

THE RUDOWITZ CASE

EDUCATIONAL SERIES—THE CARNEGIE FOUNDATION—MR. BRYAN'S ARGUMENT

CAMPAIGNING WITH BRYAN

LETTERS FROM THE PEOPLE

RAINEY AND THE PANAMA CANAL

GOVERNOR HASKELL'S STATEMENT

COMMENT ON CURRENT TOPICS

HOME DEPARTMENT

WHETHER COMMON OR NOT

NEWS OF THE WEEK