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INCENTIVES TO POLITICAL LIFE.

Shall I enter the political life? What are the incentives—what the dangers? What preparation should I make in order to insure the greatest success, should I enter this vocation? These are three grave questions which present themselves to thousands of American youth.

It is greatly to be feared that many young men of rare talents and noble characters have been constrained, through the popular prejudice or the disreputable moral condition of our politics, to turn away from this profession, as perilous to their moral safety, and seek others, for which, not unfrequently, they were far less fitted both by taste and natural talents. The inquiry, then, whether their fears are well founded can scarcely fail to be of general interest.

First, then, let us balance the incentives to the political life and the objections thereto from a moral standpoint.

"In the United States," says DeTocqueville, "the people do not hate the higher classes of society but are not favorably inclined toward them, and carefully exclude them from the exercise of authority. They do not dread distinguished talents, but are rarely fond of them. In general, everyone who rises without their aid, seldom obtains their favor." That a very small percentage of our "distinguished talent is found in our legislative halls and among the "heads of government" is patent to every observer. So far, the learned gentleman is manifestly correct. But that the hatred of the people for rare talents, true culture, or self-made men has driven men of ability from the political arena, in the main, is just as clearly a misapprehension of the primary cause, and is a slander upon the spirit of true Americanism; for there is no country among the nations, where patient toil and intrinsic merit reap a richer reward, or gain it more speedily than in our own United States. It must be admitted, however, that there are several causes of recent origin, which are tending to place men of superficial attainments,

and an interior order of natural talent, in "the exercise of authority." Perhaps the chief of these causes is the degrading of the standard of higher education. But we are glad that the true reason for the dearth of talent in the political profession must be sought elsewhere. The cause appears to consist in this: While all acknowledge the profound character and the paramount and intrinsic value of the possible work of the true politician, it is dreaded as too perilous for frail human nature. Young men of lofty ideas of life are taught to shun the profession as a Stygian pool, where none can enter without becoming beslimed and corrupted. They are taught that the political arena has become so foul, that very few possess the virtue or moral strength to attempt its renovation, that none but a moral Hercules dare attempt to clean this Augean stable. Therefore the dearest interests—the peace, happiness and prosperity of the community are left to quacks, those who have no virtue to lose. This does not appear exactly right on its face. Either the profession of politics, in the abstract, is criminal, or such philosophy inculcates moral cowardice. The condition of our politics, it is painfully true, is revolting and disgusting to the cultured mind. The means used to subserve party interest, the tone of argument used in regard to matters of the most sacred importance to the welfare of the country, are such as he is ashamed to employ. Alas for modesty, ingenuousness and truth! They are no longer found in politics. Disinterestedness of action, which has been styled the cardinal virtue, is unknown. In lieu of these ancient virtues, which now only excite a smile of pity or amusement, as the tokens of quaint simplicity, our politicians deem but one qualification, necessary to success,—a virtue of purely American origin and christening, commonly denominated "cheek," a very comprehensive term including brazenness, rascality and low cunning.

The politician is subject to greater temptations than almost any other man. His cupidity, his vanity, his love of popularity and flattery, his love of cunning and strategy, his combativeness, the various social vices, are all very sharp thorns in his flesh. Is it strange, therefore, that he frequently falls! We would not have him assume a hypocritical gravity, and stifle all his natural propensities for pleasure and jollity for the sake of a false dignity. In fact, one rather likes that "festal spirit" which seems to be a marked predilection of his nature. From what has been said it is evident that no calling requires so strong and exalted a moral character as the political. This very fact fixes its rank among the professions. For the higher the qualifications, both of a moral and a mental nature required, in those who hope for success in any calling, the greater are the incentives to inspire men of true worth to enter.

What, will you turn from the path of duty, because it is thorny? Will you show a coward's back because temptation besets your way? Will you prove recreant to your country in the hour of her direst need because you fear contamination? Be a man—do not hide behind your own infirmity. We have been commanded to flee from temptation—you need not therefore let it drive you from the post of duty; but if you find any money tables anywhere that need upsetting, go boldly into the temple, though inhabited

by a den of thieves, and turn them over. If the difficulties are many and the battle severe, will not the triumph of your victory be more glorious in consequence?

In the choice of what other profession would you allow the probabilities of temptation and danger to terrify you?

The political life is a pre-requisite to sound statesmanship. The profession of the true statesman, in any land, is the grandest station to which any mortal can attain. If this be true in general, it is doubly true in the United States. Aside from our grandeur and vast territorial extent as a nation, the constitution of our government is such as to require the greatest prescience and wisdom at the helm of state. Where the people are sovereign and universal suffrage prevails, great and sudden changes will continually occur. The most profound wisdom is therefore necessary on the part of the statesman to prevent public calamity and dangerous catastrophe, as the result of perpetual change and revolution. From this very constitution of our government, he who hopes to become a statesman, must first become thoroughly educated in *practical politics*. In order to attain the best success, he must know how to wield and construct our political machinery, from the local caucus to the executive department of the general government.

Therefore all the grand incentives to the life of a statesman, are your incentives to the political life. Hence if Heaven calls you to this life, do not plead moral cowardice as an excuse. If evil men have made politics a cesspool of corruption, and a scene of avarice and intrigue, there is more need of your integrity to purify it. But be *very sure* that you have a call before you enter. In the political profession, even more frequently than in the clerical, men mistake for the sacred voice of Heaven, the pleadings of their own selfish desires to occupy a station for which they are totally unqualified, and in which they are unwilling honestly to earn success; for I believe that the call to the political life comes from just as high a source as the call to the Ministry, or any other profession. How will you know when you are called? When you feel that consciousness of self-power stirring within you, telling you that you can prevail in the struggle, however severe—not a feeble and groundless wish to reap the transient honors of such a station, and rejoice in the empty plaudits and adulations of the masses, but when the conviction has sunk down deep into your heart, that here is your allotted work, here is where you can accomplish the most for your country and for humanity, and do it in the best manner—when this conviction is ever present with you, like the monitions of a sleepless angel—your last thought when the soul is folded in the arms of slumber, often the fabric of your nightly visions, and your first recollection when consciousness returns—when you have felt this, and have clearly realized the magnitude of the life-work you are about to undertake, then put on your helmet and breast plate, take your sword in your hand and go out to the battle, for you have heard the command of the only divinity which will ever address you—the yearnings of your own being for its proper sphere. There is no grander field of labor than the political. No theme inspires to nobler deeds of benevolence and usefulness. The statesman has a most sacred work to do. The happiness of nations depends upon his heart

and brain. His acts may effect the happiness, not of a single individual, community, or state, but the happiness of every individual in the nation—and indirectly in the world. His deeds will tell upon every department of human life, from the regulation of the domestic relations in the private family, to the drafting of national treaties, the ratification of Magna Charta, the disposal of vast armies, and the regulation of the Ocean's commerce. The practical sermons of one Webster, one Seward, one Chase can accomplish more real reform in a nation, than the homilies of a thousand eloquent divines. Though his labors may not be labeled with the sacred seal of gospel truth, nevertheless they are sermons whose precepts are productive of moral reform, and they possess this advantage—that they must be obeyed, for they come in the imperative form of law.

But let us try to gain a still clearer conception of the grandeur of the political profession.

Suppose that by some power you were endowed with perennial youth, and were borne to the summit of some lofty watchtower overlooking the broad nations of the civilized world, and that you could observe the teeming, surging, struggling stream of human life for a century.

At one time you behold a great financial crisis imminent. Soon the pitiful cry for bread will be heard in the great cities. But see, who is it that has produced a magic touchstone, converting poverty into wealth, thus diverting the catastrophe? Again you behold Famine, or Pestilence, hovering in the horizon, about to overshadow the nation with her sable pinions, in whose fatal shadow lingers death! Who is it that rises among them like an angel of light, and rears a golden serpent in the wilderness of their distress that all looking thereon may live? Who is it that, with wisdom almost divine, reveals the heretofore latent resources and slumbering forces of the nation, and cheats Famine of her prey?

Once more you behold the people bleeding and groveling beneath the heel of Oppression, while legal murder stalks through the land threatening all who murmur with instant death. Who is the Cromwell, the Hampden, or the Henry that takes the monster by the throat, and leads his suffering countrymen out to the gracious light of liberty?

Again you behold bloody Treason threatening to rend a peaceful and happy land. What Webster is that, whose "voice of more than Roman eloquence" causes Treason's champion to quail and tremble like a drunken man; and what Jackson is it whose iron will and Spartan courage is the effective exponent of that eloquence?

Who is it that in times of tranquility, is continually leading the people up to still higher planes of educational and material prosperity?

This Saviour whose hand is ever stretched forth to shield from peril, or labor for the common good, is the *statesman*.

The great problems which statesmen are called upon to solve, in the present day, are an extra incentive to the student to prepare for this profession. The scholar played a minor part in the sensational politics of other days. Then the issues were sharply defined. Contending passion, benevolence and hatred—pure patriotism and bitter prejudice raged in the nation's breast. Passion and sensation fired the hearts of all, marked out the