

"THERE IS NOTHING WHICH IS HUMAN THAT IS ALIEN TO ME." TERENCE.

VOL. I.

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The Moral and Political Decadence of American Institutions.

[Continued.]

It would be an office wholly ungracious thus to set forth the evidences of our moral and political decadence, were there not a hope behind, that, out of the unplesing exhibit there might grow some suggestion of good. It is only by portraying the evil in its fullest magnitude that we can be fully impressed with the lesson of its accompanying danger. For the history which a danger greater and graver than any we have yet encountered. Hitherto the forms of our constitution have been respected though the spirit has been perverted. Hitherto our personal rights have been secured though the public rights have been practically lost. We need but travel a little further on the downward road and even these relics of our liberties will be swept away. In the grand corruption which made for a time the country a great danger to our country an illustration of theills the people suffer when the wicked rule, we had almost reached the point at which law itself ceases to have efficacy and the most sacred rights of person and property are at the mercy of the caprice of any adventurer bold enough and bad enough and strong enough to throttle justice in her own temples. The example of that tyranny is typical of the great danger which the country. It was only a little in advance of the general progress. But nothing is more surely written in the book of destiny than that unless effective remedies be speedily devised to arrest this downward trend, the worst was true in New York in 1870 will, long before the close of another century be true universally; and more than that, the career of defiant corruption will culminate inevitably in the downfall of a law, and a society which has become a chaos will engulf all rights of the citizen, personal or political.

Are there, then, remedies for these evils? Undoubtedly there are, but they are remedies which, if applied at all, must be applied by the people themselves, and which can only, or will only be applied by a people thoroughly aroused to their dangers and their duty. The wide departure from the principles of a law, and a society which has become a chaos will engulf all rights of the citizen, personal or political. It is true that individuals exceptionally endowed by nature who rise by force of genius, and supply to themselves the culture which has been denied to the masses, and who, in the hands of some whom the schools can never raise above the level of mediocrity, but other things being equal, the advantage of the educated man is immense. When the adage, knowledge is power, was first uttered, it was intended to mean, in a merely material sense, as expressive of the truth that knowledge furnishes its possessor with a magazine of resources which the ignorant man has not, for the application of means to an end, and knowledge is power in a higher and a moral sense—in the fact that it leads to opinion the weight of authority and commands the respect always involuntarily rendered to recognized superiority. Genius, no doubt, is power, but culture is power also; and in genius and culture combined, humanity attains its grandest and noblest aspect. Inequalities of political rank may fall from the hands of a great man, but the inequalities of material wealth may be put away by the wild breath of communism; but in cultivated intellect there is an indestructible aristocracy, which will still survive, in spite of all the elaborate machinery of the state, as a monument of defiance of the delirious rage of human passions.

The class of educated men, therefore, though comparatively small in numbers, is, in the inherent power to control the destinies of the nation, a power superior to all the rest combined. That it is not distinctly felt to be the ruling class always and everywhere, in public and private life, in the state as in society, is owing to the fact that it is not an organized class, it has no concerted action; on many questions it is divided against itself and neutralizes its own influence, and toward some it is too indifferent to be disposed to use it. Undoubtedly it is in the hands of the few, but the few are not under such illusions still as to believe that they are the ruling class within the party is quite as practicable as reform without. To organize a new party, therefore, with the avowed design to crush the parties actually existing, would be to invite unnecessarily the antagonism of the people, and by the adoption of a less defiant policy might be conciliated and induced to act harmoniously. But there is certainly already in both parties an immense and rapidly increasing number who are prepared to shake their heads when they are told of the party discipline, and though these may not be enough to make a new and independent party a possibility, they are amply enough to hold the balance of power between the two existing parties. They will willingly accept good government at the hands of either. Let these pledge themselves to each other to withhold their suffrages from any candidate for office whose known character, as shown by record or otherwise, does not furnish a satisfactory assurance that he will discharge his duties honestly and firmly, and defiantly, if need be, of the malign influences which have controlled his predecessors, and let them, on the other hand, resolve to give their votes to that candidate, no matter by which party presented, who offers this security in the highest degree, and the managers on both sides will be compelled to bring forward good men, and the triumph of either will be the triumph of good government.

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cation of our youth. Hitherto our higher institutions of learning have neglected almost wholly to instruct the young men who they undertook to train, in the principles of the government under which they are to live, and of which they are to be a part, and in the duties which are to devolve upon them as citizens, as freemen, and as constituent elements of the popular sovereignty. Every other branch of their culture has been sedulously cared for. They are taught a great deal about the properties of matter, but very little about the passions of men; much about the perturbations of the planets, but very little about the interactions of parties; much about the constitution of the solar system, but very little about the constitution of the United States; much about the laws of the universe, but very little about the laws of the land; much about universal gravitation, but very little about the laws of the state; much about the Greco-Roman republic, but next to nothing at all about the republic to which they themselves belong. Indeed, so far is the teaching of our colleges at present from being suited to prepare the youth for the proper discharge of what, under our constitution, is really the most important duty before them in life, that it almost seems to have been purposely planned to evade that object. The curriculum of education of our youth, after we have given them the highest degree of intellectual culture our institutions are capable of providing, is turned over to the worst of all possible schools, the worst, at least, in the history of the world, the school of the streets. Such of them as enter public life imbibe the habits and fall in with the practices which they find there prevalent. They learn by imitation, as children learn to speak. They rarely refer to the principles of the constitution, or make them questions of conscience. They even accustom themselves to look with lenient eyes, or at most with only mild disapproval, upon palpable frauds in politics, such as the registration, false counting, repeating, and ballot-box stuffing, provided such frauds do not result in injury to their own party. And thus the men who are destined to stand foremost in the ranks of party politics, and who are to be the representatives of the people, are regularly trained from the beginning to familiarity with, toleration of, and finally willing acquiescence in, the worst vice of the system that has brought us to our present low estate. It is not only the men who stand foremost, and who wield the largest influence. Certainly of the men of high culture as a class this must be true, or the theory that it is well to be educated is a fallacy and what is commonly called the source of all our woes, has been owing to the abuse of power in the hands of the men who hold it. We need, therefore, no change in the constitution, but a return to the constitution; no change in the laws, but a return to the laws; no change in the methods of administration; and to this end we must have men in power not wedded by habit to existing abuses, or bound to them by interest. How shall this object be secured?

In the first place, we may safely assume that the great body of the people are honest, and are earnestly and sincerely desirous of reform. It is impossible that it should be otherwise. It is impossible that the great body of the people should be so thoroughly corrupted, or so thoroughly debauched, as to be indifferent to the ranks of private life. If there are public robbers, there must be a public which is robbed; and the victims can have no sympathy with the thieves. It follows that if any practical means of purifying the government or to any degree improving its character can be pointed out, these must beyond all question command the support of a formidable body of the people. There must exist or republican government must be pronounced a hopeless failure. The experiment of such government can never be tried again under circumstances so singularly favorable as have been afforded by the present. Now, endeavoring to organize the public sentiment of the honest masses of the people into a power which shall make itself felt in this matter, it is by no means certain that the attempt to break up and reorganize the parties would be the most judicious. The people generally are attached to these organizations and cannot easily be made to believe that the evils under which we suffer are necessary evils, or that they are created by them. Many are even under the singular illusion that their own party is honest, and that all the corruption is on the other side, and those who are not under such illusions still believe that they are the ruling class within the party is quite as practicable as reform without. To organize a new party, therefore, with the avowed design to crush the parties actually existing, would be to invite unnecessarily the antagonism of the people, and by the adoption of a less defiant policy might be conciliated and induced to act harmoniously. But there is certainly already in both parties an immense and rapidly increasing number who are prepared to shake their heads when they are told of the party discipline, and though these may not be enough to make a new and independent party a possibility, they are amply enough to hold the balance of power between the two existing parties. They will willingly accept good government at the hands of either. Let these pledge themselves to each other to withhold their suffrages from any candidate for office whose known character, as shown by record or otherwise, does not furnish a satisfactory assurance that he will discharge his duties honestly and firmly, and defiantly, if need be, of the malign influences which have controlled his predecessors, and let them, on the other hand, resolve to give their votes to that candidate, no matter by which party presented, who offers this security in the highest degree, and the managers on both sides will be compelled to bring forward good men, and the triumph of either will be the triumph of good government.

OLD FIELDS THAT NEED PLOWING

The New Crop to be Planted.

VERNON, NEB., April 19, 1890.
EDITOR ALLIANCE.—I see by THE ALLIANCE of April 12th you are calling attention to a new crop—a crop of farm legislators. I second the motion. There are certainly some old fields (not so very old either) that look as though they were terribly foul, and need to be thoroughly raked up and burned over to get them fit for farming. One is state expenses. If you will allow me I will call attention to a few legislative employees. First comes our Hon. Church, who has been a member of the senate (21st session) Neb. legislature, I drew pay for sixty days as member, and seventy-seven days as president of that body. As there was only eighty-seven days from the opening until the close, including Sundays, there must have been twelve Sundays, so his honor must have drawn pay for two Sundays. J. C. Watson, speaker of the house, did equally as well, while Tate, Rev. J. G. hornswoog, 1883 day's pay for praying for the senate. This is of that one-third of a prayer. Over in the house one Z. E. Jackson acted as janitor 142 days. These are only a few items of many. One more and I will close this list. That is an appropriation of \$125,000 to pay county treasurers' fees for collecting state taxes, as they are entitled to two per cent except pro rata with the county on the first \$7,000 collected, which might make the average \$1,800,000 per year, or \$125,000 per year. The state of Nebraska pays annually. This sum is for two years and a deficiency.

There is another field which needs raking badly. That is our state school lands. There have been granted by the general government to this state nearly 3,000,000 acres of land for common school purposes. Of this not one-quarter, or less than 700,000 acres were sold or under contract of sale at the date of the state superintendent's last report (1888). Of the money received by the state from these sales, nearly \$300,000 were lying idle in the hands of the state treasurer. The school fund is now less than \$1,000,000. The school lands are sold at less than five per cent interest. To you who are paying five times this amount, how does this rate strike you? Nearly one-half of our school lands were leased at an appraised value of \$1,800,000, and are now for less than seven per cent. The least is six, or if all is paid, less than twelve cents per acre. You who hold your title in fee who you can pay your taxes for the \$1,800,000 less than five cents per acre. As Gov. Thayer seems quite anxious just now to pose as a reformer, let me call attention to one point in his message to the legislature, where he states that the assessed value of land is \$3.50 per acre, and declared that to be a stigma on the state. Yet our model governor could not see that we were assessed twice as high as school lands was appraised for the purpose of the school fund. The school lands are assessed at less than one dollar and seven cents per acre. The least is six, or if all is paid, less than twelve cents per acre. You who hold your title in fee who you can pay your taxes for the \$1,800,000 less than five cents per acre. As Gov. Thayer seems quite anxious just now to pose as a reformer, let me call attention to one point in his message to the legislature, where he states that the assessed value of land is \$3.50 per acre, and declared that to be a stigma on the state. 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