

# The Commoner.

WILLIAM J. BRYAN, EDITOR AND PROPRIETOR.

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## THE BEGINNING OF EVIL

There is perhaps no more important lesson that young or old can learn than that evils are more easily resisted in the beginning than after they have been allowed to develop. Take, for instance, disobedience to parents. It usually begins in some small matter when the child feels that the parent has required an unnecessary thing, or refused to permit something that the child desires to do. If it were in an important matter the child would shrink from an act of disobedience, but it seems so small that the wish of the child triumphs over the will of the father or mother, and that act of disobedience becomes the precedent for others until disobedience is easier than obedience.

Disobedience usually leads to other offenses; untruthfulness, especially, is apt to follow in the wake of disobedience, being resorted to as a means of avoiding punishment or even reproof.

From disregard of parental authority it is an easy step to the disregard of the authority of government, and the disobedient child not unnaturally develops into the lawless citizen until finally the downward course leads to the door of some institution established for correction and reform. Disobedience to authority is more easily checked when it first begins to manifest itself than after the habit has grown strong by indulgence.

So, too, with the liquor habit. The taste for intoxicating liquor is far more easily avoided than it is overcome when once it is established. The moderate drinker has not only to risk the strength of the liquor habit when it once gets a hold upon him, but if he drinks at all he must defend his refusal to drink either on the ground that he is going to change his course, a thing which implies an acknowledgement of previous error, or he must give a reason that fits the particular case in hand. If he drinks with one it is difficult to refuse to drink with others, and if he accepts invitations to drink he must give invitations or seem stingy. There is less difficulty and more safety, therefore, in not commencing.

It is the same with gambling, and it is hard to conceive of a more demoralizing vice. If one gambles at all it is not easy to limit the things gambled for or the amount wagered. If one bets at all and refuses to back up his opinion with money, his opinion is, in the minds of some, discredited. If he does not bet at all, that is a sufficient reason why he should not be called upon to put up money in support of his opinion on any subject. Then, too, the gambling habit weakens a man's energies. Money won on a bet or in a lottery seems to be much more easily obtained than money secured by industry of any kind, and after one has obtained his living for awhile from games of chance he becomes practically incapacitated for any legitimate effort, and is not content with the slow accumulation that generally accompanies the ordinary forms of industry. It is the part of wisdom not to gamble at all. Where one resolutely refuses to begin he is not worried about a stopping place. And so with other evils into which the individual is likely to fall.

The experience of the state is not essentially different from the experience of the individual. As a rule the first departures from the right path

are slight and scarcely observable, but they become precedents for more and more serious departures, until the country is imperceptibly committed to policies which cannot be endured and hardly remedied. Every one recognizes in the abstract the evil of class legislation and the granting of special privileges to a favored few, and yet it is difficult to apply the Jeffersonian principle of equal rights to all and special privileges to none. Some powerful interest asks the government to suspend the principle in its favor, and the principle once suspended for one is suspended again and again with increasing frequency.

There is no reason why the financiers should determine the financial policy of the government, and yet concession after concession has been made to the financiers until they not only run the government in their own interest, but resent any interference with the prerogatives which they have assumed.

The same is true of the class legislation which has grown up under the guise of a protective tariff. Each new industry that desires an indirect bonus out of the pockets of the people claims as an excuse that others have been given a like privilege. The party that grants the privilege calls for a campaign fund in return, and as a result is re-obliged to the protected interests.

The monopolies that today menace the industrial independence of small producers would not be permitted for a moment if they had sprung up full-fledged. The public would have been alarmed at once, but they began one at a time and grew little by little until many good citizens have been made impotent to strike at the general principle involved because they have given countenance to the principle as manifested in some particular direction. Those who defend a cracker trust cannot consistently oppose a sugar trust or an oil trust. Those who think that their community will be benefited by the location of some particular trust are powerless to attack other kinds of trusts, and thus the system of private monopoly has grown until it will take a gigantic effort to rid the country of the full grown evil.

The encroachments of the judiciary through what is known as government by injunction illustrate the tendency of an evil to grow. One judge begins by issuing a restraining order so mild that public attention is not attracted to it. Judge after judge enlarges upon it until now some of the federal judges assume to issue orders declaring to be unlawful that which has never been prohibited by law, and if laboring men are accused of violating this judge-made law the judge who made the law deals with them summarily without giving them the protection of trial by jury, a right guaranteed to the meanest criminal.

Gradually the jury system is being undermined, and if present tendencies continue it is only a question of time when we may expect some open attack to be made upon this ancient form of trial. In fact, even now with increasing frequency contempt is expressed for it as a part of our judicial system. The sooner government by injunction is abolished the better; the sooner the courts are prohibited from making penal laws and

the sooner the people are restored to the protection of a jury trial, the safer will be the liberties of the citizen.

Perhaps in no other respect has the slow and constant growth of an evil been shown than in the country's dealings with the Philippine islands. No one would have been foolhardy enough to propose an imperial policy at the time of the making of the treaty with Spain. The argument then was that the war must be ended and Spain driven out of the Philippines as well as out of Cuba, and everybody acquiesced in this purpose. The means of accomplishing it were not so closely scrutinized as the thing to be accomplished. If the administration had, as it should have done, provided for the independence of the Philippines when it provided for the independence of Cuba, the question of imperialism would never have been raised; but instead of that the islands were ceded to the United States. But even the ceding of the islands to this country would not have caused any trouble if the administration had immediately upon the ratification of the treaty announced its purpose to give independence to the Filipinos as soon as a stable government was established. But instead of that those in control of the government have studiously avoided any declaration of purpose or policy, while they have, step by step, adopted imperialistic methods. At first they said that it was too early to make any statement of the nation's purpose; they then said that no purpose could be announced until the Filipinos laid down their arms; and then when Aguinaldo was captured (by artifice) they announced the insurrection over and declared that the possession of the Philippine islands had become permanent. The republican leaders today ignore the question so far as the principles involved are concerned, and without attempting to defend the acquisition of people either by conquest or by purchase, assert that it is impossible for the nation to honorably withdraw. The defense of a government emanating from without and resting upon force is already sowing the seeds of imperialism in this country. From a denial of the right of the Filipinos to control their own government it is an easy step to the position now taken by republican leaders in Ohio, and elsewhere, namely, that the people of the larger cities are incapable of governing themselves. The attempt to transfer to the state authorities the power to control city fire and police departments is consistent with our policy in the Philippines, but not consistent with the doctrine of local self-government which has for a hundred years been a fundamental tenet of government in this country. From the transfer of the government of cities to the state capital it is not a long step to the transfer of state governments to the national capital, and this was really a part of the Hamilton idea which seems to be growing among republicans. It is impossible for any one to foresee the results of imperialism, but every one who studies public affairs must know that in government as in nature growth is a universal law. Those who plant corn can expect to gather a crop; those who scatter thistle seed must expect a harvest of thistles. It is written that the wise man foreseeth evil