

The Commoner

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Constitutional Rights

The criticisms directed against the utterances of certain senators and members of congress on subjects connected with the war turn public attention to the consideration of constitutional rights and guaranties. There has been some recklessness on the part of both critics and criticized. Senators and representatives in congress are part of the government; they exercise authority conferred upon them by the constitution. They are as much a part of the government as the President himself, and the oath which they take is as sacred and binding as the one administered to him. A senator or representative has as much right to express himself on matters properly coming before congress as the President has to express himself upon subjects with which he has authority to deal. They not only have the right to express themselves, but they should do so when such expression becomes necessary to the discharge of their official duties. Only by properly discussing measures can they live up to the requirements of the office which they hold.

To say that a senator or representative in congress must of necessity agree with the recommendations made by the President is equivalent to advocating the substitution of a despotism for a republic—equivalent to advocating the establishment of an autocracy here while we are trying to overthrow autocracy in other lands.

The obligation of a senator or representative is to the people whom he represents, not to the executive. If a federal legislator acts corruptly, he should be expelled, but so long as he acts honestly and from a sense of duty to his constituents, he is within his rights, and it is not likely that any legislative body would entertain a thought of expelling him for the full exercise of his rights.

With the citizen the question of duty is sometimes more important than the question of rights. The vital question is not what he can do but what he ought to do. The legislator must discuss questions before congress—this is necessary to intelligent action by congress, but this necessity does not confront the citizen in private life. There is no reason why anyone should discuss that which has been done—when final action is taken, acquiescence on the part of the citizen becomes a duty.

In the case of proposed legislation, it is better that the citizen should communicate directly with those empowered to act—the President, senators and congressmen—than to speak through the press, on the platform or on the street. If one is really anxious to serve his country, he will choose the method of expression that promises the maximum of good and the minimum of risk of doing his country harm. Patriotism requires some to give their lives; it requires others to give their money; it may require some to hold their peace rather than risk

STAND BY THE GOVERNMENT.

Stand by the government
---it is our government. Help
the organizations that are
helping the soldier boys---
they are our boys. Buy a
Liberty Bond---it is our
war.

creating dissension or discord by public expression of opinion when such expression is unnecessary.

W. J. BRYAN.

DEPOSITORS' NEED OF GUARANTY

The disclosure of the Martindale embezzlement, which will be found on another page, is another proof of the need of a law guaranteeing depositors. The Chemical National Bank of New York is one of the oldest and best known banks in the United States. It boasted of its conservatism and caution. And yet it was found that its late president, Mr. Martindale, was for years a forger and an embezzler. While he sat with the directors in council he was secretly taking the money of a trusting depositor, his stealing running up to \$300,000! The remedy is the guaranty of depositors.

If a bank president can deceive his directors and stockholders, what chance has a depositor to find out whether his money is safe? Guaranty would protect depositors from burglars on the inside. Why not?

W. J. BRYAN.

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Following a Brutal Example

On another page will be found American newspaper comments upon the decision reached by Great Britain and France to retaliate on their enemy by the dropping of bombs on defenseless women and children in Germany in return for similar brutalities practiced by Germany. It is quite human to yield to a feeling of resentment and yet, human as it is to adopt retaliation, this form of retaliation is none the less INHUMAN, and it is to be regretted that the allies have, by adopting an indefensible course, surrendered their protest against a policy that has brought upon Germany the censure of the civilized world. The logic with which the allies attempt to defend this proposed action will not stand the light of history. Future generations will blush to read that BOTH sides resorted to the deliberate murder of innocent women and children. "They did it first" will lose its power to soothe the conscience when the passions of war have cooled and reason has resumed her sway. It is a false logic which could be used just as well to excuse the mutilation of prisoners or the use of submarines against passenger ships.

If the example of Germany, instead of being denounced as infamous, is to be followed, we shall lose a moral argument which has been of great value in strengthening the purpose of the American people and which has made it easier for German-Americans to divorce their sympathies from the fatherland. It is most unfortunate that this moral argument can no longer be used—it is a distinct loss that will far outweigh an advantage to be gained by imitation of a form of cruelty so revolting.

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THE REASON IS PLAIN

In a recent issue of the World-Herald, attention is called to the fact that the Omaha play houses have experienced a decided increase in patronage over the September business of last year. Manager Burgess is quoted as saying:

"I do not pretend to know what cause, or combination of causes may be responsible for this highly agreeable state of affairs. But it well may be that despite the high cost of living, people can better afford to spend money for amusements than in the days before Omaha went on the water wagon."

Mr. Taft is to invade the west again on a speaking trip, this time for the purpose of impressing the people with the unwisdom of an inconclusive peace. In view of what happened to spoil the ex-president's trip west in August last it is to be hoped that he will make a wiser choice of hotels or of menus therein.