

American Political Ideals

(A speech delivered by Hon. Jno. Garland Pollard, LL. D., Former Attorney General of Virginia, on the Chautauqua platform, June, 1921.)
Ladies and Gentlemen:

From sixteen hundred American platforms in forty-three states of the union, the speakers of the Radcliffe Chautauqua System will this summer address five million American citizens on the subject of American political ideals. I am proud to appear as one of the representatives of this great Chautauqua system, which not only seeks the promotion of culture through high-class entertainments, but which at the same time is performing a highly patriotic service in calling the attention of the people of this country to the task of lifting higher and yet higher, those political ideals which have made the United States the greatest nation on earth.

When a man speaks of ideals, there are those who at once put him down as a dreamer—blind to the actualities of life. But every step in the political progress of man, from serfdom to sovereign people has been but a triumph of an ideal, and all future political progress must depend on those who entertain ideals and are willing to fight for them.

On the other hand, it must be admitted that along with our ideals must go a knowledge of the stubborn facts of the past and present. It is therefore not unworthy in this connection to refer to the material aspects of our political situation.

HOW POLITICS AFFECTS OUR MATERIAL INTERESTS

It is for this reason that in discussing political ideals I shall first seek to bring to your minds how vitally politics, the science of government, affects your material interest at every stage of your existence,—how close home the government comes to every individual,—how it sits at every hearthstone,—a silent unobserved visitor. Yes, the government's solicitude for the individual's welfare begins before he is born. While he is yet in his mother's womb, yea, even before he has taken form or shape, the law protects him by branding and punishing as a felony any attempt to interfere with his coming into the world. When he is born, the fact of his birth is made a permanent legal record. The government then begins to look after the infant's food and seeks to maintain the purity of the supply through pure food and inspection laws. It knows that the growing child must be the special subject of its protection against contagious diseases, and the laws are made to prevent their spread. It then leads the child to the schoolroom and there takes charge of his training. It follows him up through the grades into the high school where it undertakes to give direction to his life by providing him with manual training and commercial courses. It also provides for him colleges and universities where he may further pursue his studies or fit himself for the professions. Nor is this all. He can not become a lawyer, doctor, dentist, teacher or an undertaker without standing an examination prescribed by law. And then he steps out into life. But the government hasn't finished with him yet,—yea, it has only started, for it largely prescribes the conditions under which his young life shall be spent,—whether he shall be surrounded by the temptation of the bawdy house, the gambling den and the "speak-easy." And then when he is ready to take upon himself the real responsibilities of life and lay aside "single blessedness" he can't even get married except in the manner and form prescribed by the government. And then when he comes under the dominion of his wife, surely then, it is time for the law to let him alone, but no, it decrees that he support that wife and sends him to jail if he doesn't. And then when the children come, he must support them too, and how? By furnishing them shelter, food and clothing, the prices of which are materially affected by tariff and other taxes fixed by law. And so the government follows the citizen all through his life, prescribing the conditions under which he shall conduct his business and how much of his earnings he must give up in taxes. Yes, it follows you down to your dying day and after you are dead, it prescribes how long your body may be kept out of the ground. Now is this the last of the law? It then takes charge of your estate and distributes it out among the lawyers. The government would not stop even here, but would go further and levy a tax on your happiness or misery in the next world, but fortunately for you the tax collector never

knows which way you have gone. Other concerns of life begin with the cradle and end with the grave, but not so with your government. It reaches out for you before you are born and feeds on what you have left after you are dead and gone. And yet, and yet!—few of us think we have time to give to politics, the science of government.

FINANCIAL BURDENS IMPOSED BY GOVERNMENT

And now turning more specifically to the financial burdens imposed on us by government, let me call your attention to the fact that in early days the government touched the individual but lightly and remotely. But now in the progress of time it has grown into a gigantic business machine gathering for its maintenance billions of dollars each year. Our governments, local, state and national, cost us approximately 7,000 millions a year which in the average is about one-eighth of the income of every man, woman and child in the United States. Or, to put it in another way,—our governments, local, state and national have become so huge as to absorb the total income of all the people for one-eighth of their time, or a month and a half in each year. This is an appalling fact which should make every citizen realize what his government means to him in dollars and cents,—in good, hard cash! I do not mean to say that every citizen pays one-eighth of his income in taxes, but what I do mean is that the average citizen is burdened in about that proportion by taxes paid directly by him plus those indirect taxes passed on to him by others and which are hidden away in the cost of everything he buys. These indirect taxes are no less burdensome than direct taxes, for there is but one source from which the government may derive its sustenance and that is from the earnings of the people. The only difference is in the degree of consciousness of the burden. The indirect tax has proven less objectionable, for taxation has been described as "the art of so picking the goose, as to get the greatest amount of feathers with the least amount of squealing."

THE BURDENS OF MILITARISM

And what a change the recent World War has wrought in our national finances! The last congress made total appropriations amounting to 5,686 million, of which 93 per cent may be charged up to war; that to say 93 cents out of every dollar paid into the national treasury last year (after the war had ended) went for pension obligations and debts contracted for past wars and in maintaining the army and navy for possible future wars. And this proportion is destined to increase if we continue to hold aloof from disarmament agreements with other nations, for if we attempt to play a lone hand, those will prevail who are sure to insist on as big a navy on the Atlantic as the combined navies of Europe, and on the Pacific as large a navy as that of Japan. And, think of it, my fellow citizens, out of every dollar you pay into the federal treasury only 6 cents goes to the ordinary expenses of government, such as congress, courts, executive departments, public buildings, rivers, harbors, roads, and the like and only 1 cent out of every dollar is devoted to scientific and educational work. These facts in themselves are sufficient to arouse the attention of every patriotic citizen.

POLITICS AS AN INSTRUMENTALITY OF SERVICE

Thus I have sought to show you how your governments affect your material welfare. Now let us turn to the consideration of political ideals,—politics as an instrumentality of service to others. American political ideals may be taken to refer to those principles of government set out in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States, but the ideals of which I shall speak are those individual ideals of political duty which must prevail in America, if we wish to approach Lincoln's standard of a government of the people, by the people, for the people. Love of country and love of God,—patriotism and religion are closely related. I can not conceive of a man who loves his God and hates his country. In times of peace our patriotism is measured by our interest in politics and the only yard stick by which we may measure a man's religion is his interest in his fellow man.

RELIGION AND POLITICS

We are accustomed to think of our religion and our politics as things entirely separate and apart. Our conception of politics has sunk so low that we think it sacrilege to speak of politics and religion in the same breath. Politics

is doomed to remain in the mire so long as the average voter thinks that his religion has nothing to do with his politics. Politics is the science of government. Government is an instrumentality for the welfare of mankind and religion is concerned with everything which affects man's welfare.

Our religion, not our sectarianism, should permeate and direct all of our activities not only in church but also in state and in business. In all human relations we must apply its principles to all of our every-day dealings. To forbid the entrance of Christian principles into movements for the betterment of mankind simply because such movements have a political aspect, is to put a limit upon our religion and to say that it has nothing to do with those questions which most vitally affect the welfare of the human race. This does not mean a union of church and state. For when the church teaches fidelity to the duties of citizenship, she is no more interfering with politics than she is interfering with business, when she teaches us that we must be honest in our dealings with our fellow man. Let us call to mind some of the activities which are today recognized as within the sphere of government and examine them to see what relationship, if any, they bear to the teachings of our religion.

ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE

One of the first and oldest functions of the government was the establishment of justice between man and man, and after centuries of thought and study we have built up a system of jurisprudence, which, though constantly and slowly improving, does not yet accomplish the ends for which it was constituted. Reform in the administration of justice is today one of the important concerns of internal government. Our courts while aiming at justice, are bound down by an antiquated procedure unfitted to the needs of the day, and in the trial of cases, the time of the courts and the lawyers is largely consumed in the discussion of questions of procedure rather than in the merits of the controversy, and justice is not infrequently sacrificed to form. Does our religion concern itself in the administration of justice? What man can read his Bible without being impressed not only with our duty to do justice but also to seek the establishment of justice, and in seeking after justice can the Christian ignore his government,—one of the chief agencies through which justice is to be secured? Listen to the prophet Isaiah: "Cease to do evil! Learn to do right! SEEK JUSTICE! Relieve the oppressed! SECURE JUSTICE for the orphan and plead for the widow." Isa. 1: 10-17.

ESTABLISHMENT OF PEACE

Again our government was constituted to secure peace at home and with the nations of the earth. "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will towards men." Luke 2:14. This was the sentiment which announced the coming of our Master and yet shall we His followers ignore the fact that one of the most powerful agencies for bringing about peace on earth is our government?

Bear in mind that what I am now trying to do, is to bring to your attention the powerful influence of human government in attaining the objects towards which our religion teaches us we must strive.

EDUCATION

Another great task that the government has undertaken is the education of our youth. So important did Christianity think education to be, that the churches preceded the state in providing institutions of learning. If the advancement of education be a Christian duty, how can a Christian neglect his government, the principal agency through which the education of youth is to be attained?

PUBLIC HEALTH

Again, in modern times, we find the government undertaking to be the guardian of public health. It is striving to stamp out the dread disease of tuberculosis, which is killing its hundreds of thousands, and likewise it is fighting the spread of all diseases from which mankind is suffering. Has our religion nothing to do with these bodily ills? Stop and think to what extent Christ's short ministry on earth was taken up with healing the sick. And if Christianity is concerned with the sufferings of the body, how can the Christian neglect his government, which in the complexity of modern life is a most necessary agency in preventing the spread of disease and lessening the pain and suffering of the human race.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

Again, the government is undertaking to secure social justice by regulating the hours of labor for men and women, prohibiting child labor and securing a minimum