

## MORALS AND POLITICS.

## A GREAT QUESTION DISCUSSED BY AN EMINENT DIVINE.

Cardinal Gibbons Expresses Important Truths—Their Application to Political Life Pointed Out—Honesty Should Be the Politician's Guiding Star.

There is a saying long familiar:—"Everything in its place." And great Solomon records that "all things have their seasons and in their times all things pass under heaven." No fault can be found with such a general statement, and I am of the opinion that order, tranquility, peace and prosperity depend upon the faithful observance of the rule. Let questions be discussed on their relative merits without the introduction of irrelevant matter. Much misunderstanding and evil result from disregard or infringement of the wise enactment.

But there is one question that must exert universal sway—one branch of human effort that necessarily enters into the consideration of every question and is connected with every avenue of human endeavor; and that is morality. Ralph Waldo Emerson declares that "the moral sentiment alone is omnipotent." The ethical code must prevail everywhere. The sense of morality must permeate all strata of society and be wedded to all phases of its activities. There can be no aspect of man's life that should be viewed independently of that standpoint. Whatever question man considers, whatever act he contemplates performing, in whatever direction he bends his energies, moral ideas find both place and occasion for the application of its essential principles. For, in the words of John Locke, "morality influences men's lives and gives a bias to their actions."

## THE SCIENCE OF HUMAN DUTY.

Morality or morals is the science of human duty, and embraces the entire series of human acts, public as well as private. Man has not been made the creature of his own caprices—not the machine of mere sentiment—nor the animal of pleasure and instinct. He has come into the world that he might secure the Creator's purpose and obey the laws of his existence. He does not come from himself; he has not made himself. He depends for what he is on the will and power which made him. No abstraction is possible of man as man from man as a moral being. He is endowed with free will and intelligence and rational nature, and he is under the permanent obligation of rendering his life conformable to the God-imposed laws of his being. Within his breast he bears implanted the instinct of right and wrong, the knowledge of good and evil. The law has been stamped upon him in indelible characters. The internal conscience is his approved guide and his thoughts within him "either accuse him or else defend him." From all this arises his fundamental motive of action—which is, not what he may, nor what he can, but what he ought. He is always under the rule of this law, this will of the Most High. He cannot escape. As long as he acts with intelligence and free will, as long as his faculties are in a normal condition, he is bound to see that he violates not the eternal decrees, that his conduct is in accord with the principles of truth and justice. God, himself, his fellow men form three heads of duties, and the perfection of human life lies in the exact performance of what they imply and command. No man is completely ignorant of these things, and even the untutored savage, though not so distinctly and clearly as the civilized and enlightened, yet truly possesses the knowledge of subjection and due submission to the higher Power whose will and designs he feels bound to fulfill as best he knows and can. All our deliberate acts, then, must rest upon the basis of morality which teaches that those in opposition to our rational nature must be avoided because they are evil, and those in agreement with our rational nature must be accomplished because they are good.

## POLITICS AND SOCIAL LIFE.

But what, if any, connection have these truths with politics? Do not politics form a domain entirely independent? Is not the field wherein they play one from which morals had best be absent? It is precisely the absence or disregard of them that accounts for the corruption and evils of which honest minds and true statesmen and sincere politicians so

loudly complain as existing in the workings of practical politics. Politics should claim no exception from morality's searching gaze and inexorable dictates. Politics or the science of civil government has relation to the social life of men, and its object is to secure for the aggregate of individuals and families banded together for mutual happiness, benefit and protection, their inalienable rights and privileges. The hands in which the power of governing is placed are to be raised in benediction and love, and the exercise of this power must tend directly and immediately to the welfare of the commonwealth. The union of human beings in municipalities and states and countries arises from a divine ordinance and from the needs and requirements of our nature, which is social. The individual, however, does not lose his autonomy when he becomes a factor in the social fabric, as was the case in the Roman empire, and the pursuit of life, liberty and happiness is none the less his, though he be disposed to relinquish something that the whole, of which he is an integral part, might gain. Yet we cannot but regard the state as a unit, or every community as an individual in which are inherent the ineradicable instincts of self-preservation and rights similar to or identical with those possessed by each and every man. Our conduct towards states and communities, therefore, must be characterized by all those elements, features and qualities demanded when we treat with one another. As we are obliged to remember that our neighbor is a child of the Begetting Spirit with the same endowments as ourselves, and we must do to him as we would be done by, so politicians must remember the personified character of the state or community, and be careful to be guided towards it by strict principles of morality. We must apply the teachings of ethics to practical life, and politics form a branch of practical life.

## THE POLITICIAN AND THE PEOPLE.

I speak of all politicians, whether they be so in the rigorous and noble acceptance of the term which implies statesmen of the Gladstonian type, or actual rulers of the people in official position, or in the less favored sense, of those who run what are called the political machines. They all more or less influence or take part in the management of public affairs of government. Their interference gives direction to our civil destinies. Their power works weal or woe to our social existence. And both because they are private individuals and public functionaries, and because we are their fellow-men and component parts of the body politic, they have strict and imperative moral duties towards us which they cannot well afford to pass over or neglect. Just here I would quote as briefly summarizing and beautifully appropriate the wise words of the Pagan Epictetus (Book III., chapter vi., on Statecraft): "If thou wouldst have a household well established, then follow the example of the Spartan Lycurgus. For even as he did not fence the city with walls, but fortified the inhabitants with virtue, and so preserved the city free forever, thus do thou not surround thyself with a great court and set up lofty towers, but confirm the dwellers in the house with good will, and faith and friendliness, and no harmful thing shall enter; no, not if the whole army of evil were arrayed against it." And it was Montesquieu, I believe, who still more succinctly expressed these same ideas when he wrote that republics are preserved by virtue and monarchies by honor. Politics and politicians should be governed by a public conscience rich in maxims of morality, in rules of justice and equity, in sentiments of honor and dignity. Honesty, veracity, justice—behold the triple alliance, the primary dictates of morality, to which they must swear eternal loyalty. Let politicians then be honorable men, truthful men, just men.

## HONESTY THE BEST POLITICS.

Honesty is the best policy and the best politics. It is identical with honor and means uprightness of conduct. It is a quality that is indispensable in every sort of transaction. No man who would win respect and confidence of others and who would wish to attain permanent and solid success in his undertakings can neglect or despise it. It is the foundation of true business as well as of noble character. Let it become known (and it

will sooner or later if dishonorable and dishonest means are resorted to) that certain firms, certain men, are tricky, mean, unprincipled; that they are disposed to take undue advantage of clients and customers, that conviction sounds the first note in the downfall. Some temporary success may follow under-hand methods. But such only makes the final, inevitable crash the more fearful. The best interests of trade, the solidity of mutual intercourse, demands that everything be done over and above board.

Political tricksters are an abomination. And it is because of political meanness, political dishonesty, that good and loyal, true and honorable men complain so loudly of political corruption. To the politician are entrusted sacred interests of the people. We follow, we cannot do otherwise than follow the lead of our public men. They are commissioned to direct public affairs of government for our good. We give them confidence; we rely on their judgment and superior experience. We contribute funds for the carrying on of those projects that are to result, as we trust, in conditions favorable to our peace and prosperity as a people. Have we not a right then to expect our leaders to be men of probity and to be honest in their dealings with us? Deception, fraud, subterfuge, are a betrayal of the public trust. Cheating, chicanery, defeat the popular will. Baseness and all questionable measures or unseemly devices are subversive of public order. Every action that is not sanctioned by the principle of honor tends to make politics a mere machine which has come to work untold evil in our political institutions and to give to our public affairs a direction by no means apt to secure for us the blessings of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness.

## POLITICAL ORGANIZATION A NECESSITY.

Political organization is a necessity. Every man recognizes that banding together is a legitimate factor in the prosecution of aims and purposes. "In union there is strength." But then the operations of that organization are not exempt from the spirit and qualities which must govern men individually—the spirit of honor, honesty, fair play. How worthy of commendation and universal practice, "I had rather be right than be president."

Honorable men are also truthful men. They will not adopt what Talleyrand has been credited with saying—"Speech was invented to conceal thought." Words should be expressive of inward ideas. Intercourse with one another is founded on the assurance that a man's word says what he means. A man's word should be as good as his bond. If the bond is known to be worthless, financial transactions lose a support and enterprises fail. If a man's word cannot be relied upon, if a suspicion be true of some lying and deceit hid in that word, the man of whom such is noised abroad loses caste and loses companions and friends. How should the politician whose word because insincere and untruthful cannot pass muster, hope either to be successful in his management of affairs of state or municipality, or to be instrumental in bettering the condition of his fellow-citizens? There should be no room to suspect him of hypocrisy or double-dealing. Let him speak the truth. Let him not give groundless assurances. Let him not delude his constituents or leave them under false impressions. When he speaks let it be after mature deliberation. When he promises, let it be only after he has seen hopes of realization. Then some stability will be given to intercourse with our public men, some reliance will be placed on their utterance to the manifest purity of our political methods, the prosperity of our institutions and glory of our political parties. Otherwise politics will be worse than a game of chance, they will continue to be a mere "jingoism," productive of disastrous confusion.

## THE POLITICIAN MUST BE HONEST.

I have not much to add in reference to justice, which is really closely consequent upon honor and truth. Justice renders to every man his due. Now the man who is honorable and true will do that. The politician must be just to all classes. He is among the leaders of the people and must look to the interests of all the people, neglecting none, favoring none above others. His standard should be—not what might bring in more votes or a larger popularity—not particularly what will benefit his own party, but

what the rights of every section and of every class demand. He must be just to the state. In his distribution of patronage the good of the commonwealth must be his guiding star. "Public office is a public trust" finds here very pertinent application. Business principles—should they not be followed in the affairs of state?—require that the most competent should be entrusted with the offices, and duties given to those who will fulfill them to the gain of the employer. The state or the city is the employer.

He must be just and exact in the use of public moneys, the people's money, which is given from patriotic motives, for the expenses of the government. Taxes should not be levied over and above what may be reasonably necessary for public purposes, for the just debts of the community, and providing for the adornment and cleanliness, improvements and repairs of public works—all of which have for object that men may live and decently live together.

When collected the funds should be jealously guarded and economically expended. Extravagance should be avoided, and, above all, no effort made to divert those moneys into private channels. The politician is only the trustee, the money is the people's. And account should be rendered to them of the same. This is nothing more than strict justice demands from individuals with one another, and it has not less strong application in reference to the body politic.

The essential principles of morality therefore come into play in the political arena, and pure politics must be informed and permeated with them. The politician of every stamp and degree as well as the merchant, the mechanic, the capitalist, the laborer, is a moral being and must abide by and practice the precepts of the moral code. To him as well as them was given the decalogue.

JAMES CARDINAL GIBBONS.

## EARLY RISING.

A person should never be waked except in cases of urgent necessity. When a man falls asleep, he is in a shape for repairs. All the intricate machinery of his body is being overhauled and put in order for next day's work. Nature knows what the tired body needs. She lays it on the bed, surrounds it with the refreshing air of night, covers it with darkness, and lets the man rest. "Tired nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep," visits him, and as the hours pass by his energies are renewed, his strength comes back, and when the daylight steals through the window he opens his eyes and feels like a new man. If he is early to bed he wakes correspondingly early. Now, who will go to that man's side an hour before he opens his eyes and say to nature—"Stand aside and let him get up. He has got enough rest." Nature will say: "You can take him if you will, but I will charge him with an hour's loss of sleep, and I'll collect it out of his bones and nerves and hair and eyesight. You can't cheat me. I'll find property to levy on." Nature is the best bookkeeper in the world. You may overdraw, but you must pay back, even to the "pound of flesh."

## STONEWALL JACKSON IN BOYHOOD.

After Stonewall Jackson's death, a New York merchant said of him: "I never met Mr. Jackson but once, yet an incident in which he had part exerted a strong influence over my early life. I was a boy in college, eager to be considered a man, but often hesitated to maintain the principles taught me by my mother, lest I should be called weak and womanish."

"I happened to be seated at supper one night next to Jackson, who was a somewhat younger lad than I. While waiting to be served, one of the boys drew from his pocket an indecent picture on a card, and passed it to his neighbor. It was slyly circulated among the students near by with shouts of laughter. When it came to Jackson, he glanced at it and threw it down contemptuously, saying quietly: 'That is silly and beastly!'

"The boys were silent. One of them threw the card on the fire. I felt a sudden stiffening of my whole moral nature. It was so easy for him to be decent and manly! Why not for me?"

"I can say candidly that that momentary touch of a strong, bold nature put new health and vigor into my own." —*Sacred Heart Review.*