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World-Wide Young Methodism

X.—Young Methodism and Citizenship

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BEING a follower of Jesus Christ does not excuse a man for his neglect of the duties of citizenship that fall to him. A good many Christians—and Methodists are among them—seem to think that they are too good to take an active part and share in the conduct of the government. As if there were danger of contamination in the contact. And, on the other hand, there are a great many people who are not good that take advantage of the absence of the former class and operate the political affairs of the nation to suit themselves.

The Christian citizen should always have the highest interests of his nation before his eyes. This means that he must be greater than any political party, and must direct his acts in accordance with conscientious views of what is best for the nation. The Christian must be guided by his conscience rather than by the dictates of any political power in the exercise of his civil rights and privileges.

Then he should always be in his place as a citizen, that means that when need arises, or an emergency confronts the country, he should be where he can serve the country best. If there is a political issue before the people he should be found in his place defending it if it is righteous, and denouncing it if it is unrighteous. If a great moral issue is under discussion his place is in the forefront, battling with the reformers and the best citizens for honor and truth, and for the nation's highest character. He must always be on the Lord's side, and that is on the side of practical civic righteousness.

History is full of incidents of the downfall of great nations through the development of the weaker and vicious propensities of the people. Where courage is of a high order, where honor prevails and virtue is preserved as a bright and beautiful jewel, the national life is sure to be pure and permanent in its influences; but in every case where the vicious elements of the heart or mind have come to supremacy, degeneration and deterioration have set in and the doom of the nation has been sealed.

If a nation is to develop on the higher lines it will be because the best elements in its citizenship are in supremacy. And that is saying in another way that it is the duty of every man and woman professedly and possessing high ideals of

civic virtue not only to live up fully to those high ideals, but to see that those ideals are carried out in the practical affairs of everyday life in the community in which he or she may live.

No Christian has a moral right to be identified with any movement, political or otherwise, that will result in the exaltation of any man or of any cause that will interfere with the higher development of the national life. The roots of civic righteousness are deep down in individual virtue, and if there is a lack of fidelity in the individual character there is sure to be a weakness in the civic life of the community.

If Christian men and women were to organize themselves into "a league offensive and defensive," to use John Wesley's phrase, against every form of evil that invades the home and the community and diminishes the vitality of the national life, many of the agencies of corruption that are prevalent among us today would have their power curtailed and might be destroyed utterly.

Take, for instance, the liquor traffic. It flourishes largely because the Christian influence of the community fails to assert itself and to exercise its rights and privileges. If there were a high ideal of civic righteousness in every community it would not be possible for the liquor traffic to flourish and to invade and blight so many homes, destroy the flower of the national life, and besmirch the national character. It is the indifference of the Christian Church that permits this abominable traffic to continue its frightful havoc among the people.

But this is only one of many evils that flourish in so-called Christian lands. The Christian's attitude against it should be one of unrelenting hostility. But he should maintain the same attitude of enmity against every other form of evil. And his attitude should be not only one of hostility against evil, but of friendliness toward good, and of co-operation for the permanent establishment of uplifting influences in the community.

Unfortunately the tendency to do evil is more easily followed than the inclination to do good. There are a great many weak-kneed, apologetic, trimming, time-serving Christians in the world. They are a hindrance rather than a help to the Christian enterprise. Instead of standing firmly for the right, they are quite ready to compromise with evil.

When they have been elevated to high station, where they have the opportunity to wield a great influence for good, they become pliable when they should be inflexible, and they yield to all manner of wrong-doing, the results of which are not overcome for generations.

One bad man in a place of great power is a frightful calamity to a nation, simply because it seems easier for some men when they have the responsibilities of office upon them to do evil than to do good, and an evil example in a place of prominence is seized upon by many as an excuse, and sometimes as a justification, for wrongdoing. The record of many a nation is soiled by the bad lives and examples of its statesmen and rulers, who accepted office under the most solemn pledges and did not hesitate to break those pledges when their selfish interests led them to do so. One result is that much of human history is the record of crimes, and that record is written in blood.

There rests a great responsibility, then, upon every Christian who has the welfare of his country at heart. He must see to it that he does nothing himself that will nourish a disregard for the law. The honor of the land should be sacred to him. He should have a high regard for those in authority. The office a man fills should receive proper respect, however, even if the temporary occupant of the office should be a man for whom one cannot command respect.

Then he must give faithful attention to the discharge of all the duties that devolve upon him as a citizen. In order that as far as in him lies no improper man may get into public office, and no office may be used for improper purposes. The integrity of the national honor must be maintained by him in spite of all attempts to lower it through the manipulations of persons who would make merchandise of it. He must engage in the turmoil of political life, even though it may be very distasteful to him, for the sake of the country's better life and higher advancement. And with it all he must keep himself wholly unspotted from the world in which he must act and with which he must mingle.

It may not be agreeable for the Christian to do all this, and it surely will not be very easy, but the duty is so plain and the necessity so urgent that no self-respecting Christian should hesitate to