

have beamed upon you, out of my scene. Not a gentleman that walks the street but should have beheld his own face and figure, his gait, the peculiar swing of his arm, and the coat that he put on yesterday. Then, too, — and it is what I chiefly regret, — I had expended a vast deal of light and brilliancy on a representation of the street in its whole length, from Buffum's Corner downward, on the night of the grand illumination for General Taylor's triumph. Lastly, I should have given the crank one other turn, and have brought out the future, showing you who shall walk the Main-street tomorrow, and, perchance, whose funeral shall pass through it!

But these, like most other human purposes, lie unaccomplished; and I have only further to say, that any lady or gentleman, who may feel dissatisfied with the evening's entertainment, shall receive back the admission fee at the door.

"Then give me mine," cries the critic, stretching out his palm. "I said that your exhibition would prove a humbug, and so it has turned out. So hand over my quarter!"

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#### ART. IX. — ABUSE OF REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT.

It seems to be very generally felt, that the morals of politics in the United States have declined gradually, since the establishment of our constitution; and yet there is no agreement in the opinions of men, as to the cause of the decline.

It can, we think, hardly be attributed to any general decline of morals in the nation; for careful observation shows us, that, while certain classes in our cities have been departing further and further from the true idea of a republican society, the people of the country at large, and especially the farming population, have been approaching nearer to it, and have thus more than compensated for the loss. The votaries of fashion and of pleasure have done something, certainly, to ingraft the vices and follies of Europe upon our native stock; and the *debris* of the immense flood of emigration which accumulates along our shores cannot but increase the

grinding competition which is so rapidly swelling the lists of criminals and paupers in our great cities. But, meanwhile, our common school systems, our Lyceum lectures and libraries, our newspapers and pamphlets, and especially the great Temperance Reform, have rendered an immense service in opening the intellectual and moral views of the farmers, and rural population of all classes. Our factories, too, have added to their intelligence and property, without, thus far, having injured their morals. On the whole, we think it may be safely affirmed, that the entire population of the non-slaveholding states is better fitted now for the exercise of universal suffrage, than it was when the Constitution was proclaimed. We are aware, that, in the opinion of many persons, the undeniable growth of our farming population in intelligence and external morality has been accompanied by a loss of reverence and loyalty which fully counteracts the gain. We are not, however, of this opinion. The loss of reverence complained of has been, we think, rather the growth of a spirit of analysis and inquiry, and a separation of hollow forms from those which still symbolize or express a sentiment, than a real loss of reverence for religion or virtue; and this is best proved by the fact of the moral reform everywhere visible throughout the country, in the greater sobriety, industry, and refinement of the people, and in the growing disposition to look into the moral and religious basis of our laws and social habits.

As for the slaveholding states, it *may* be true that they have suffered a general moral decline. We are by no means sure that such is the fact, however; but, in relation to questions of slavery, their legislation seems to indicate it. At the same time, we cannot at all agree with those who are disposed to trace all our national sins to the one foul blot of slavery; nor can we believe that our Constitution, in recognizing and permitting slavery, and providing for the restoration of fugitive slaves, has admitted a poison which can be cast out only by breaking up the whole organism. This seems to us a hopeless and a faithless doctrine, and is tantamount to an assertion that the Constitution not only has one great evil in it, but that it has little or no good in it. If it

has, on the whole, a healthy principle of life in it, which is worth preserving, may it not be made to throw off the poison, without sacrificing its existence? Does not analogy teach us this mode of treatment? We do not cut down the tree because the worm has tapped it, nor kill the animal stricken by disease, — at least, not until well assured that the recuperative powers of life are completely exhausted; and who shall say that the Constitution of these United States has reached that point of prostration? That slavery has done much, and is still doing much, to retard the moral advance of our Northern people, we are not disposed to deny; and that it has had hitherto an undue influence in our national councils, to which many disgraceful acts of the legislature and the executive are entirely due, is beyond question. But why has it possessed this power? Not, we apprehend, from any sympathy felt by the people of the North with slaveholders, *as such*, — not because these Northern people had become demoralized by slave-legislation, — not because the members of Congress had sworn to support the Constitution; but because these Northern voters and their representatives were selfish and ignorant and passionate men, more desirous to gain their private and their party ends, by allying themselves with the slaveholding power, than they were to eradicate a moral blot from our national system, at a sacrifice of, what they supposed to be, their interests. This barrier to improvement is, however, giving way. The voters are becoming more enlightened upon the true merits of the case; their consciences are getting awakened; and, besides, the conduct of the South is driving them to action, and their very selfishness will prompt them to prevent further extension of slavery and slaveholding influence. *Let us now suppose this to have been done*; the party tactics and selfish passions of the North to have been turned fully and successfully against the slave-power; would there not still remain a vice in our political condition, which would continue to degrade the morals of politics, and warp a fundamental idea of our Republic from its original and only true basis? We apprehend, that, unless other changes than any we have hitherto adverted to were made, there *would* be such a vice in full

activity, and that we should still be left in the extraordinary situation of a people who, under a popular form of government, is improving in its social life, while it is degrading in its political life. The vice we allude to, and which appears to us so fatal, is *the perversion of the character of the representative*, and, of course, of the representative government.

If there was any one point upon which the founders of our Republic especially depended as a security against the misfortunes which have overtaken all the earlier democratic states, it was doubtless our representative system, by means of which they hoped to avoid the introduction of the passions of the multitude into the councils of the nation. Mr. Madison, in one of his articles in the "Federalist," says, speaking of the delegation of government to persons elected, — the effect is "to refine and enlarge the public views, by passing them through the medium of a chosen body of citizens, whose wisdom may best discern the true interests of their country, and whose patriotism and love of justice will be least likely to sacrifice it to partial and temporary considerations. Under such a regulation, it may well happen, that the public voice, pronounced by representatives of the people, will be more consonant to the public good, than if pronounced by the people themselves convened for the purpose."

Again, in the same letter, he says, that the representation of the Union will present the advantage of a body "whose enlightened views and virtuous sentiments render them superior to local prejudices, and to schemes of injustice."

This doctrine sounds strangely to us now, with our party pledges and instructing legislatures. It is because we have lost the true idea of a representative, and have substituted for it one of an attorney or agent, — a mouthpiece of a certain number of voters in some obscure district. Instead of selecting the wisest and the best man, and allowing him to go, entirely unshackled, to investigate and decide for us, we have come to choosing the man who will make the most ready professions and promises; the object not being to select a representative of the wisdom and conscience, that is, of the highest *character*, of the district, but to select an able or a noisy expounder of the preconceived notions and opi-

nions of the district, so as to place the Legislature as nearly as possible in the position in which it would be, *were the voters of the district personally present*, with all their ignorance, prejudice, and passion. But this is precisely what the founders of the Constitution wished to *avoid*, in establishing a representative republic, since, they argued, that it would be more stable and sound than a pure democracy, because the government would *not* be administered by the people themselves, who are so easily misled by the ruling passions of the hour, but by the choicest spirits, whose wisdom and patriotism would secure them against local and temporary influences, and whose voice would *therefore* "be more consonant with the public good, than the voice of the people themselves, convened for the purpose."

It is not our intention here to inquire how the perversion of the representative character has gradually been brought about; but merely to call attention to the fact, that it is now complete, and that, without an amendment in this particular, it is in vain to look for a return to the purity of our institutions. If senators feel that they must either resign or vote as instructed by a majority of their State Legislature, whatever may be their own views; — if they forget that they are chosen by the State, not merely to do its bidding, to represent its *will* at any given moment, like an attorney, but to act under the Constitution *for* their State, but in the interests of *truth and justice as applied to the Union and the world*, and with a direct responsibility to their Maker only; — if they lose sight of this high duty and this high responsibility, how can they preserve the dignity of the Senate? how can they retain the character of *authority*, without which government becomes contemptible? It was clearly not the intention of the founders of our Constitution to make senators and representatives directly responsible to the bodies choosing them, as principals whose wishes alone they were to consult; for such a responsibility takes away all character of freedom, whether of thought or act. It degrades the representative, not only morally, but also intellectually; for, if all he has to think of is the opinion and will of his constituents, the newspapers will be his chief study, and the caucus his arbiter of political science. He is

degraded from the proper position of a true man, as much so as a lawyer who is arguing, for money, a case which he does not believe in; and the most that can be expected of senators or representatives, under such a system, is, that they should become keen and unscrupulous. How, then, can we expect men of the highest moral stamp to come forward, or, if they do come forward, to retain their places and their honesty both? As mere agents, they would be morally bound to resign, when required to act contrary to their sense of right; and, with the changing majorities, this would be very likely, in the natural course of things, to happen during the term for which they are chosen.\* Can any one believe that it was intended by the fathers of our country to place senators in such a position as this, — to make them the mere puppets of popular changes? The idea, as applied to a Senate, is ridiculous; and whether applied to the Senate, the House of Representatives, or the Executive, it is destructive of the element of stability, which was chiefly sought in the establishment of a *representative* form of government, as well as to all true liberty, which can exist only as connected with stability.†

\* It follows that, in this view, the chances would be in favor of the senators being forced either to violate their consciences, or to resign very frequently in the ordinary working of the government.

† We are aware, that there is supposed to be a difference in the position of the senator and of the representative in this respect. The latter has *more liberty* than the former. He is merely "requested," while the senator is "instructed," to change his vote, by those who have chosen him, and who may, or may not, choose him again, that is, by his masters. The representatives, it seems, are not so completely mastered yet as the senators. This strikes us an extraordinary perversion of the intention of the framers of our Constitution, by which what they intended as the *conservative* branch of the Legislature has become gradually the most partisan and pliant. It could not be otherwise under the doctrine of "instruction," the most direct and striking effect of which is to destroy the *unity* of the Senate, leaving two or three struggling factions, ruled principally by partisan or sectional prejudice.

During the last session, the sectional tyranny in the Senate counteracted the endeavors of the House to do common justice.

We look in vain in the Constitution, or in the writings of its founders, for any distinction in the liberty of the senator and representative to follow his conscience, during the term for which he is chosen. On the other hand, all the arguments in the "Federalist," in chap. 62, 63, and 64, show that *more stability* was looked for in the Senate than in the House, *because the members were to be chosen for a longer term*. But what security could this be,

The truth is, that the whole notion of a government responsible to the people, in the sense usually understood, is absurd. It may be best, in certain stages of social progress, to have an elective government, and one chosen, like our own, by universal suffrage; but this can be true only on the supposition, that the nation will, on the whole, choose better men to govern, than would be chosen under an oligarchy or a despotism; and *this* can happen only if the men so chosen feel their responsibility to God more directly and intimately than if placed in power by an aristocracy, or the chances of birth or of war.

The difference in the mode of selecting the government is of little importance, *excepting so far as it produces this effect*; and, when once the choice is made, in one form of government or another, the governing power remains responsible only to God. It has the proper character of government, only so far as it embodies the eternal principles of God; and its *only* right, therefore, *is* the divine right. There may be a great choice in forms of appointing and changing the rulers, as tending to increase or diminish the temptations to depart from uprightness in the administration; and we are well convinced, that our own Constitution, as understood by those who made it, is better suited to our state of society than any which has yet appeared in the world; but there can be no difference in the nature of the responsibility of the government, when established. In no case can the parties, chosen to administer it, look to the human appointing power as the guide to right government: here, indeed, they may meet with an exhibition of *might*, which may support it or overturn it; but, to find the *right*, they must look higher. On the other hand, a delegated government should be looked up to

if, with each change in the party majorities of his State, the senator were expected to change his argument and his vote, or to resign? The truth is, that, if the senator were a mere State officer, he would be perfectly free during his term: how much more important is it when he forms a part of the Government of the Union? Once chosen, he is no more under the control of his State, during his term, than of any other State. His duty is to the Union and the world, under his responsibility to his Maker; and, if he falls in his duty, he may be impeached, or the Legislature of his State has power, when his term expires, to choose another in his place, and that is all.

by the citizens, during its existence, with all the respect which can be shown to any government. If it is not *more* worthy of respect than any other, it should be abandoned, as not the best form of government. It deserves respect as embodying the collective wisdom and virtue of the country, which it is supposed to do, and ought to do; and, if it does not, it is the fault of the people, and may be remedied at the next election. During its existence, however, it cannot lose its freedom, without losing its character of a government; it cannot be, at once, the servant and the ruler of the nation. The term "public servants" seems to have added to the confusion of ideas, if it did not arise from them. How can the persons, to whom we have given *authority* over us, be our servants? The servile character destroys all authority.

There can be no doubt, that the successful candidates for office will be found among those who are content to look no further than to their constituents, so long as the public demands nothing better. If it wishes its deliberative assemblies to resemble collections of sharp attorneys, squabbling for the so-called interests of their principals, it will find no lack of men well qualified and ready to squabble; but if it wants men fitted to be legislators in a great nation, which ought to lead the movements of true liberty in the world, and every part of whose political structures is destined to be studied in the old world, and to exert some influence either for good or for evil, it must adhere to the original theory of the Constitution, which is based upon *true* patriotism and toleration. Without these, its machinery will not work. No clever pretences, no balancing of selfish interests, will prevent its running down. The latter may do to keep the wheels going in some Constitutions, of a lower order; but ours was intended for, and can only be worked by, men of honesty and intelligence, "whose enlightened views and virtuous sentiments render them superior to *local prejudices*, and to schemes of injustice." How far pledges and instruction will conduce to this latter end, can be seen without much elucidation.

This brings us back to the apparent contradiction adverted to in the beginning of these remarks, namely, that the morals of the nation have been and are actually improving, while the



morals of politics are sinking. We have ascribed this anomalous state of things principally to the perversion of the idea of a representative government; but it may be asked, why, if the people have advanced in knowledge and character, have they allowed this abuse to creep in? The answer is, that, although the people have improved, they are still far short of the standard which the fathers of our country set before themselves, and had in view for the nation; and, meanwhile, time has developed the temptation and the opportunities to abuse. The people, instead of being above the Constitution, as we hear frequently said, are, in our opinion, still far below it, morally and intellectually, and especially in one grand characteristic, — that of toleration.

The obstacles which have constantly retarded the advance of true liberty in the world, in all countries and at all times, may be divided into two classes: those which have been *wilfully* raised and maintained by gross, barefaced selfishness, cruelty, love of conquest, and the like; and those which men have *unconsciously* interposed in the path of freedom, blinded by various forms of self-love and ignorance. Among the latter, intolerance has played, and still plays, a most prominent part, and no less in this Republic, which boasts of its freedom, than in the older countries, where its baneful effects are known and confessed. By means of this bigotry or intolerance, the great body of honest voters (and we presume that the majority of voters, of all parties, act with honest intentions) are prevented from looking on more than one side of the questions submitted to them, without being at all aware of it themselves. With the best intentions in the world, they may thus conduce to the moral debasement of their representatives. Having themselves what they conceive to be a full understanding of important social and political questions, in which they are supported by those with whom they principally associate and sympathize, they are equally unable and unwilling to look fairly on the other side; and they naturally, under the circumstances, conclude that, as the other party cannot have any right on its side, they are bound to take all steps in their power to secure the adoption of their own views. Here the evil of the thing begins to show itself,

when they are induced to overlook the moral character of the *means* employed to produce conformity with their views. The first and most obvious means is to secure a candidate who will promise, first of all, to be guided by their opinions, or, what is the same thing, to make his own coincide with theirs. The first point, therefore, is to make sure of your candidate's views: if he be a good man and intelligent besides, why, so much the better, but first make sure of his views! This is the feeling, and it may exist among men of zealous, honest, and *improving* character; but it cannot be applied to the representative without curtailing his liberty, and reducing his moral status: for making sure of his views means making sure of your man; he becomes *your* man, loses property in himself, and feels that he must either do what you expect of him, or betray a trust. Is this man fitted to be a leader, a ruler, for ever so short a time? Is he not rather, from the day of his election, tempted to be a follower, an anxious watcher of the tides of popular feeling?

The earnestness which makes men insist on what they believe to be the right qualification in their candidate is a virtue; but the ignorance which makes them think that none but their own view can possibly be right, and that they can add to a man's fitness to take a part in the important work of *government* (which must be, either to his intelligence, knowledge, or honesty), by depriving him of his liberty, if not a positive vice, is certainly a deplorable fault. We could hardly believe, if we did not see it done on all sides, that men of intelligence and of the purest intentions would be disposed to adopt such a course. That corrupt party leaders should seek to bind and direct their tools, we can readily understand; but that men of conscience, of all parties, the "conscience party" no less than others, should make haste to reduce their candidates, as quickly as possible, to *mere partisans*, — should wish to curtail them of their full proportions as men, to take from them, in fact, that which constitutes them especially *men*, — which is their freedom of thought and action, — is one of the strangest things under the sun.

There may be a confusion in some minds between the

limitations to powers conferred by the Constitution on different members of government, and the abridgment of the liberty of the party acting within the range of those powers. Such persons may argue, that, as there is a limit to the legal action of each member of the government, the liberty of each is curtailed; and hence that there is no liberty in the representative but to do the will of his constituents. The two things, however, are entirely distinct. The Constitution establishes checks and limitations of power, in order to prevent the abuse of liberty. The establishment of the limitations shows of itself, that, within the range of the powers granted, liberty should remain unimpaired; otherwise no limitation would be needed. The limitation relates entirely to the nature of the powers to be exercised, not at all to the freedom of mind and will in the exercise of the powers granted, — whereas all party pledges strike at the latter; and they cannot do this under the pretence that it is to prevent the abuse of liberty, for two reasons; first, because the Constitution, in the limitations referred to, has already established the necessary check; and, secondly, because liberty, to be abused, must be exercised; whereas they destroy liberty.

Republicans, who wish to retain the purity of their institutions, must beware lest they allow their zeal to outstrip their liberality. They must remember that the same reasons, which make it their duty to spread their views of good government by all *proper means*, make it equally incumbent upon those who differ from them to do likewise; and that invading the liberty of a citizen, and, above all, of one who is to assume the responsibilities of office, is a *highly improper means*. It is all-important for the zealous to be liberal and tolerant; for the salvation of the Republic rests with them. The indolent and the selfish will certainly never raise our national standard of right; the work must be done by the zealous. They are the salt; but, if their saltiness be neutralized by the ashes of intolerance, where shall we look for help?

If now we glance at the actual state of things, as compared to what we have said it should be, the contrast, if it were not too important in its consequences, would be absolutely ridicu-

lous. Hardly a candidate for any office is put up, that he is not assailed by a dozen zealous party leaders, who urge him to pledge himself to something. Temperance men, tariff men, free-trade men, native Americans, free-soilers, abolitionists, all push forward their *sine qua non*, and say, "Agree to our terms first, or we will not vote for you, *however otherwise qualified.*" It is in vain for the candidate to point to his past course and his general character, and beg to be allowed to go to his duties entirely free; to decide all practical questions upon their merits, when they shall arise. This satisfies no one; and, after being bandied about by his tormenters for a time, he makes a *bargain*, and agrees to be a sound politician, as party A understands it, if party A will support him, or as party B understands it, if party B will support him; or sometimes, when the claims are not absolutely contradictory, he buys the votes of several squads of voters with his ready-coined promises, and so makes up a bundle of political virtues, at what he perhaps considers a low price. But he is mistaken. The price he has paid is exorbitant beyond reckoning. He has exchanged all that is real in political virtue for a bundle of shams!

The history of our Congress, of late years, is the history of this school of politics. The scholars have made rapid progress, and in their annual exhibitions have given the world ample proof of it; so that the electors who have chosen them have often become ashamed of their choice, and have come to feel that their representatives, instead of being, as they should be, above the level of the nation, are actually below it; and yet they express astonishment that this should be so. Do they not remember that they chose these men to be their "servants," and that the master is greater than the man? Have they forgotten that they chose them without *faith*, depending not on their virtue and character, but on their promises and supposed interests; that they did not expect to bind these representatives to them by their independence and courage, but rather by their selfishness and their fears; and that there is nothing ennobling in this connection, but, on the contrary, every thing degrading? How can they expect, then, that men so chosen should be leaders of the

people? There may be a few bright examples among them, but the great body must be time-servers. There is no getting the results of virtue and high-mindedness out of selfish calculations and fears. Arrange it as you will, it always comes back to the hopeless problem, which Carlyle says modern shrewdness is wasting time on, — namely, “Given a world of knaves, to educe an honesty from their joint action.”

It may be thought, and perhaps justly, that the election of General Taylor by so large a majority, in the face of his refusals to make himself a party man, indicates some re-action in the feelings of the people in regard to pledged candidates. There is no doubt an instinctive admiration felt for one who exhibits an independence of this kind; and when, as in the case of General Taylor, it happens to be supported by other qualities which strike the imagination of the people, it may be triumphantly carried through. But the difficulty is, that it is merely an instinctive feeling, and not an intelligent opinion, in favor of this independence, and that only with a portion of the people. Many feel, on the contrary, as if it were a kind of underhand proceeding in a candidate to refuse to “support” the party which is about to “support” him. They look upon it as a species of fraudulent reserve in a *bargain*, by which they may be entrapped into giving their price, without receiving their equivalent. Even those who have an admiration of the kind of mind which disdains to bind itself, are afraid to give way to the feeling. The “sober second thoughts,” so much lauded, come in and spoil their better instincts. They think they must bind a man by his ambition or his interests to agree with and act for *them*, lest his intelligence or his conscience should lead him to take some other course. Here is exactly the difficulty.

The representative is regarded as the agent of his constituents, chosen to do their bidding. They would like to have a noble and a *free* agent, provided always he *will* do their bidding: in short, they wish to secure the aid and guidance of virtue, by means which can command the services only of selfishness. Even in General Taylor’s case, we fear that his sound views, shown in refusing to hold out any hopes to any class of partisans, was but little appreciated in fact,

although it was much talked of, by his supporters. His successes as a soldier, together with his general manliness and humanity of character, were universally acknowledged, and probably obtained him nine-tenths of the votes which were cast for him.

If the views we have presented be sound ; if it be true that our political character has been degrading, since the first few years of our national existence, without any corresponding decline in the intelligence and morals of the people, and even in the face of an improvement in those qualities, mainly in consequence of a perversion of the representative character, which has assimilated our Republic too closely to a pure democracy, the question becomes interesting, — Can this democratic usurpation, which threatens to sweep all before it, be arrested ? In considering this question, we think it must be admitted by all, that the mere fact of a constant improvement in the character of the people is of itself a very hopeful symptom. If the people *have improved* under all the degrading influences of party warfare, they may improve still more ; they may improve until they see the evil clearly, and have virtue enough to overcome it. It is evident that the only check to the license of democracy in this country is to be found in the character of the people themselves ; and fortunately our most enlightened men are no longer weighed down by the hopeless theory which still blots out the light of the future from the eyes of many a sincere patriot and worldly-wise legislator of Europe. *There* the opinion has always prevailed, and still prevails with those who have the power, that, when democracy has once begun to feel its influence increasing, nothing can prevent its finally degenerating into license and anarchy, excepting an *opposing interest* of some kind, as a counterpoise, — such as a wealthy privileged class, or a ruler supported by a powerful army. They do not admit, that any check to the headlong course of democracy can be found in the morality and intelligence of the people, whom they consider as *necessarily* too blind and passionate to put any restraints upon themselves ; or rather to *keep* any.

This view may be true enough as applied to the present

condition of the people of Europe, and we fear not altogether inapplicable to the present condition of this country; but, admitting this, does it follow that, because the democracy has never yet been sufficiently enlightened to see its errors, and curb its overbearing tendency, *it can never become so?* Certainly it does not follow; but, on the other hand, if the fact be that the people have improved, with full liberty in their hands, and a tendency to license in political matters gaining ground, it is a fair inference that they can go on advancing until a majority shall see clearly, that, in order to attain the highest results, they must be *governed*; and that, in order to have a conscientious and efficient government, they must bind themselves to it, in a spirit of loyalty, during its term of existence; surrendering frankly into the hands of their delegates the powers apportioned to them by the Constitution, to be used, in all freedom, under the best lights which this representative government can command.

The people, however, cannot learn this self-restraint, without a most efficient and extended system of education. As the population increases, with such immense recruits, too, from the ignorant and shiftless of other lands, it will be impossible even to maintain our present relative degree of virtue and wisdom, without constant effort.

This subject has been most ably and fully handled by the late Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education in his various Reports, in which, we think, he has made it apparent, that, if the Common School system is extended and improved as it ought to be, and especially if in their management the utilitarian views are kept subordinate to those of an elevated morality, the people *may* be educated to a point which will enable them to carry out fully the highest theory of our Constitution, and perhaps eventually to devise a better one.