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Political Influence

In estimating the effect of public measures on the people, the influence of institutions upon individual morality is very often neglected. Yet this influence is by no means trifling, and the government which leaves it out of sight in the enactment of its laws, and the appointment of public functionaries, loses one great element of power.

There can be no doubt ~~but~~ that in many instances the moral vigor of a people has been seriously impaired by the neglect of this ^{consideration} principle. The old Romans seem ^{fully} to have understood the degrading influence of vicious legislation and corrupt legislators when they instituted the office of censor to protect the morals of the people. It was the duty of ^{this} officer to act as a committee of Moral Health, to examine all laws passed by the Senate previous to their being inscribed upon the Tables, and if he found anything therein which he considered prejudicial to public morality to advocate its removal as a moral nuisance.

This purgation of the Legislative atmosphere was no doubt highly beneficial to the Roman State, and contributed not a little to the deterioration of its power.

There are three methods by which evil disposed legislators may impair the morals of those for whom they legislate;—first, by legal enactments of a vicious nature and immoral tendency;—second, by neglecting to punish certain evils, thus offering a temptation

It would greatly improve the mechanical form of your compositions if you would make the commencement of your paragraphs at ~~the~~ uniform distance from the margin.

to Vice and Crime; - Third, by the demoralizing effect of their own private acts and conduct.

Of the former of these there are numerous and startling examples. In fact there is probably no nation, whose morality has not, at some time or other, been degraded by the influence of wicked legislators, through the medium of evil enactments. No nation perhaps more strikingly illustrates their effects than Sparta.

Beginning as she did by legalizing the commission of certain crimes and gradually advancing along the path of Evil, she came at length to enforce almost the whole catalogue of Vices. But for this the governmental system of Lycurgus would have been one of the most stable and effective ever known, and Sparta would have maintained her true position among the states of Greece.

The Romans slackened the rigor of their marriage laws to shield a favored few from punishment, and divorces soon became a matter of no moment, the sacred marital tie was broken without cause other than the wish of one of the parties, and Roman profligacy began.

This naturally led to other domestic evils and we soon find the grave and philosophic Pliny advocating the law of infanticide, showing that the murder of ones own offspring had become so common at Rome as to be viewed even by those who were called the great and good of the nation without horror or even aversion.

Of the second of these methods, the offering temptation to crime, I can conceive of no better illustration, than the law of vengeance

doubtful

presumption

It has been employed by Herodotus and Grote at least.

and insufficiency of our present laws
against bribery. There can be no doubt as to
the astonishing prevalence of this crime ~~among us~~
at the present. Almost every Government Official
has his price, — and many of them are miser-
ably small, — for which he will sell his private
honor and his public trust. Who that has ever
been a frequenter of any of our ports has not seen
the Custom House official take the roll of Bills
which the Importer with averted face held
towards him? Thus we have become a nation
of bribers and defaulters, simply because our
laws lacked stringency upon that point, until
at length corporations as well as individuals
have turned corruptors of official honor and
openly boast of feats of bribery. Probably the next
step will be to enact laws to punish those
who refuse to accept of bribes. ~~Part~~ ~~to~~ ~~the~~ ~~third~~
means of moral degradation which lies with-
in the power of Legislators, — their personal
influence, there can scarcely be a doubt of its
potency. Tacitus tells us that the Roman peo-
ple "came at length to love the vices of the
emperors as much as they had formerly ven-
erated their virtues." Nor does Rome alone
testify to the truth of this principle. So uni-
versal is its application, and so numerous
the examples that will ^{occur} occur to every mind
that it is entirely useless to state instances.

In a personal, and moral, as well as a
political point of view "the people should
rejoice when the wicked ~~burst~~ sway," for the
moral degradation they inflict, no revolution
can wash away.

them

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Governmental Influence

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