

Christian Citizenship

From the Golden Rule

## CHRISTIAN CITIZENSHIP.

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**W**HAT is Christian citizenship? The culmination of the two grandest ideas that have ever found lodgment in the mind of man. Christianity requires each man to regulate his conduct towards every other man by the rule, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." This is a measure of Christian motive. Whoever would except from its operation any relation of human life, is the enemy of Christianity, no matter what his name or church may be.

Christian citizenship applies this principle to the performance of the duties of citizenship. As I, a citizen of the United States, would desire you, another citizen of the great republic, to act, were our positions reversed, so must I act in the discharge of my duties as a citizen. The man who adopts any other rule of public action is not a Christian citizen. He may be a Republican or a Democrat; he may be a member of the church, a minister or a layman; but he is not a Christian citizen. He may believe in salvation through Christ, but he does not believe in the Christ-like love of man nor apply the Christ-like measure of duty. He may have a hope of heaven; but, so far as this world is concerned, he is merely a heathen who does not count it essential that he should help make true the daily prayer, "Thy kingdom come . . . on earth." He is a Christian for salvation only, who mocks the Master with the flimsy lie that he can apply the Golden Rule to his personal and individual relations, and be a thief, a robber, an oppressor, or wholly shirk his public duties, and be a Christian still. It is not so; no one can evade the most important duty that can confront him, and rightfully bear the name of the Nazarene whose message to those who believed in him was "Do."

But what is citizenship? The noblest, richest, and grandest field of Christian endeavor. The man who keeps his daily life pure and sets a shining example of personal devotion does well. The man who studies and expounds the written Word does a noble work. He who searches out the sorrowing and comforts them is a worthy messenger of Him who died for man. He who relieves the poor and saves the tempted by his generosity, does much for the kingdom of God on earth. But the Christian citizen who performs his political duty in the light of Christian philosophy, often does more for a man and man's salvation than they all. Where they touch one life, he influences, for good or ill, a million. While much of their work is of to-day, his extends from generation to generation, so long as the earth endures. However grand and worthy any other field of Christian endeavor may be, this in a sense is grander and nobler, because it is essential to the full and just performance of every duty devolving on every citizen, whether saint or sinner, believer or unbeliever, weak or strong, of low or high degree.

What, then, is citizenship? It is the exercise of that portion of a nation's sovereignty which rests upon every one on whom is bestowed the common duty of establishing, maintaining, and perfecting "a government of the people, by the people, and for the people." It is

the exercise of a sovereign power, no less kingly because it rests on millions, no less kingly than if typified by the diadem upon a single brow. It is the kingship of self-government,—the obligation that rests on every one to use his power, his influence, his knowledge, his energy, to give to each of his fellow-sovereigns, and to their children forever, the best conditions that he is able to secure for them, the richest blessings ever conferred on man. Christian citizenship simply adds to this duty the infallible test of what is just and true: "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." This is the measure of the citizen's duty to his country and fellow-citizens. He who applies this to his own conduct is a Christian citizen; he who fails to square his public action by it is not a Christian citizen.

The duty of citizenship is among the most important that a Christian believer can undertake, first, because it touches more lives than any other; and secondly, because it is most essentially in accord with Christian philosophy. The fundamental principle on which it rests is that the citizen shall use his power in State or nation, not merely to promote his own ease, wealth, or renown, but so as to remedy suffering, heal crime, stimulate endeavor, promote justice, give full security, to elevate and develop the manhood of all the people of which he is a part, each of whom owes a like duty to him. No man in any private capacity can touch so many lives for good or evil; and to be a Christian citizen is a thousand times nobler and more important than any other post of duty to which the Master calls the believer.

In order that one may perform his duty as a Christian citizen it is necessary, (1) that he give attention to what is for the best interests of all the people, judging their needs by his own requirements under like conditions; (2) that he study carefully the means by which his influence as a citizen can be exerted; (3) that he shall not seek to avoid any duty thrust upon him, nor make any association or body of men the keepers of his conscience, or delegate to any other the duty it is incumbent on him to perform; (4) that he be ready always to elect the better of two alternatives, neither of which may be wholly to his liking.

The power of the citizen is exerted, (1) in shaping, controlling, and regulating the principles, policy, and conduct of a party; (2) in the choice of party candidates; (3) in the exercise of the elective franchise, and (4) in voluntary action for the cure of public abuses,—as in making complaint and securing the punishment of offenders.

Parties mark the divisions of public thought with regard to fundamental principles of public policy. There

are certain things which are always of paramount importance. The inherent rights—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—are among these. Nothing can compare with these in importance. Prosperity, individual or collective, is nothing, if life is insecure, if liberty is restrained, or the pursuit of happiness denied, beyond what may be absolutely necessary for the common welfare. Of course, every man must yield something of his primary right in order that the public order and general peace and quiet may be secure. In our form of government the means by which even these inalienable rights shall be secured is one of the fundamental points of variance among parties. From the very outset there have been two views of the functions of the States and of the general government or nation: the one being that the States alone can consider the welfare of the individual, and the other insisting that the general government is bound to regard not merely the will of the constituent States, but also the welfare of the individual citizens of those States. This distinction runs through every line of policy adopted by either of the great parties. Now it has one name and now another. At the last analysis it is always the same.

To these grand divisions of popular thought other issues,—questions of finance, administration, and matters which affect more or less seriously individual conditions or collective relations,—attach themselves from time to time. Occasionally these become controlling questions, and form the basis of new parties.

The first duty of the young citizen is to determine to what party he will give his allegiance. This is absolutely essential to the performance of his duty, since outside of party organization he becomes a weak, ineffective integer; acting with it, he is part of a force, each individual of which adds to the power of his own conviction. Especially is such affiliation needful in order that the voluntary work of party organization may not fall into unworthy hands. There is no such thing as hiring a substitute to take the place of the citizen in the army of liberty. Each one must perform his own allotted task. It is the duty of the citizen, not only to support the party whose tenets most nearly agree with his own belief, but also to see to it that the party remains a clean and honest exponent of its professed principles. Whenever it becomes a machine to promote individual interests or record the will of a clique or faction it is evident that the Christian citizen has neglected his duty, has failed to attend

and control the caucuses and keep the party to which he belongs a fit instrument for the promotion of the Christian purpose.

The duty of the citizen to his party continues until he changes his opinions as to public policy, or the party ceases to be a faithful representative of such policy. In the former case, he simply attaches himself to another party, having changed his political views; in the latter



case, he refuses to support his party's candidates because they are of improper character, or are put in nomination by some corrupt or unfair influence.

The personal character of a party's nominee may release the citizen from all obligation to support him, (1) when his moral quality is such as to shock public decency, or bring the party and the constituency into disrepute; (2) when the citizen believes the candidate to be either corrupt or incapable. The implied contract between the citizen and the party is, that it shall nominate fit and capable candidates. If it fail to do so, he is of course released from all moral obligation to give them his support. It is very rare, however, that a citizen is justified in voting for the candidate of an opposing party without a change of political faith. The reason for this is that the opposing candidate naturally represents political views fundamentally antagonistic to those of the voter, and to give such a man his support is to become a supporter of principles he does not believe.

In the study of political conditions one fact should always be kept uppermost in the mind of the Christian citizen desirous of doing his whole duty as a Christian citizen; this is, that the sole object of any government is to promote the security, liberty, and welfare of its citizens. Life being the most precious of human possessions, maintaining its security is the most sacred function of government. Fidelity in this is one of the highest proofs of excellence. A despotism which protects its citizens is better than a republic which leaves them the victims of violence. The same is true in a scarcely less degree in regard to liberty and justice. A government which does not protect the rights and liberties of its citizens against the aggressions of other citizens by a strict and impartial administration of justice, is not only a bad government, but, whatever its form, is likely soon to become the very worst of governments,—a government of caste or of mere brute force. Anarchy and injustice are the closest of kin. The man who is not secure in his rights of person, assured of legal redress of wrongs, and permitted to exercise the right of free speech in regard to all public questions, is no more a free man in the United States than he would be in Russia; is as truly tyrannized if restrained by fear of the mob as if restrained by fear of the Czar.

The reason why political corruption has become so deplorably common is the fact that there has been an almost universal attempt to divorce Christianity from politics. In our inherited fear of a state religion, we have gone so far as to exclude from the scope of Christian principles the most important field of human thought and action. Even Christian believers do not fear to assert that Christianity has nothing to do with a man's conduct in that arena. It is held quite possible for a

man to be a saint personally and a scoundrel politically. It is generally thought necessary for one who would promote even the most worthy political purposes to deceive, to mislead, to pack caucuses, to buy votes, and perhaps even to corrupt legislators. None of these things seriously impairs the character of a professing Christian, or affects his standing in church or society. A man who would be expelled from both if known to have stolen a dollar from his neighbor, may buy a vote or steal a return without any fear of unfavorable comment in society, or a reproachful word from the pulpit.

The first and highest duty of the Christian citizen is to rebuke, discourage, punish, and drive out unchristian and immoral methods, and to insist that the justice which is based on the universal rule of Christian ethics, this philosophy of right first proclaimed on the Mount, shall be the standard by which political as well as personal action shall be judged. Just so soon as it is counted as infamous to bribe a voter as to rifle a bank, to sell a vote as to barter a daughter's honor, there will be no more vote-buying or vote-selling. The divorce of Christianity from citizenship is the one sufficient cause of political corruption.

The two classes of citizens who are most clearly and unmistakably responsible for the evils of our government, in the nation, the State, and the municipality, are (1) those professing Christians who are too busy, too careless, or, in their own opinion, too good to perform the onerous and unpleasant duties of Christian citizenship; and (2) those who hold that in the performance of political duty the citizen is at liberty to leave the philosophy of the Mount out of consideration, and make individual success the sole object of his action.

These two classes are more dangerous in a republic than thieves or murderers, and the first duty of the Christian citizen is to see that they are converted as rapidly and surely as possible; for until they are, God's kingdom can never come on earth.

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