
LAWYERS

No class of men wield more influence in American affairs than lawyers. Their experience gives them a familiarity with all branches of business, and a knowledge of all classes of men. Their work is of such a nature as to make them alert. Their faculties are kept reasonably active, so that they are more available for public or semi-public work than any other class of men; hence they become not only the advisers who direct affairs, but the actual leaders of movements.

They have almost monopolized the legislative and judicial branches of our government, and have been very prominent in the executive branch. Even when not seeking positions themselves, they are, by reason of their readiness and experience, employed by selfish interests to manipulate conventions and control nominations. It is in some sense true that the American Government has been a lawyer's government.

The Cost of Something for Nothing

With such a field before him, it is manifest that a lawyer, above all other men, should be a man of character. The more purely professional part of his work is of such a nature that it should elevate his mind and develop all his faculties. This work involves wide reading, the possession of accurate knowledge, and discrimination and reasoning. It involves also the accurate use of language, spoken and written.

In the nature of things, the lawyer should be not only learned, but he should develop into a man of broad culture. Having to deal with great principles of justice, he should be above the very thought of trickery and mean things. Theoretically, the lawyer is not employed to win cases, but to see that the law is properly applied to his client's case. He is an officer of the court, and is supposed to assist the court in the administration of justice.

It is difficult to conceive of a profession that

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should develop a more beautiful and well-rounded character than the profession of the law. Occasionally we meet such a man at the bar, and instinctively we pay him homage. He may not win so many cases, he may not be employed by great criminals or by great corporations, and he may not boast of getting big fees; but there is something lofty and supreme in his character, and dignified in his demeanor.

If we have sometimes been too eager to win, and have forgotten we were officers of justice, and have stooped to become mere beasts of prey, how vulgar it all seems when we come into the presence of such a character! We feel that our very success is degrading and our reward tainted. Even though he be poor, he is far above anything that money can buy.

It is a sad comment on human nature, that while the profession of law should produce great characters, the harvest in that regard has been meager.

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Even before commercialism degraded the profession, there was a tendency to become narrow and petty. This was due to the fact that the courts in their practice had made the law a mesh of technicalities. Instead of getting at the merits of a controversy at once, and deciding it, there was a persistent effort to find out how not to do it. This turned the eye of the profession to little things, so that many men have entered the law, possessing splendid ability, fine education, and high aspirations, who after twenty years of practice became mental and moral mummies. It requires great strength of character to rise above the environment.

In so far as the courts or the lawyers indulge in quibble and refinement, the profession of the law has a belittling and a degrading tendency. In just so far it paralyzes the intellect and shrivels the soul. No quibbler ever becomes great. He is like a hen scratching in a barn-yard,—he never looks out over the barn-yard

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fence. He holds his eyes so close to the ground seeking his daily food, that he never gets a view of the vast fertile landscape just outside.

The advancing intelligence of the world gradually made the practice of law more reasonable; and then came a degrading commercialism which used the profession as a convenience.

Instead of viewing everything from the lofty standpoint of an honorable profession, there was a constant tendency in lawyers to sink to the level of trained conveniences, to the level of hired men, shrewd and able and in the market, ready to take anybody's money and to try to win his case for him, whether right or wrong. And that fatal fallacy began to take possession of the legal mind, that a man may do things as a lawyer that he could not do as an honorable citizen. This absurd sophistry has ruined more lawyers than has any other one thing. Once inoculated with this idea, a lawyer

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is lost. The effect is perceptible almost immediately. He sinks to the level of a trickster. The cellular structure of his brain changes; the expression of his eyes changes; and although a temporary success may attend his course, there can be but one ending to his career. Nothing more true was ever written than that "tricks destroy the trickster."

The writer has had reasonable opportunities, at the bar, the bench, and in public life, to notice the career of all classes of lawyers, and he has seen no exception to the rule that tricks will destroy the trickster. After each successful trick the man is weaker, and instead of growing he deteriorates. A moral, mental, spiritual and physical atrophy destroys him.

A lawyer may get a reputation because he has won cases, even if he won them by questionable methods; and a reputation for winning will bring him business, and for a time he may flourish. If he is a man of strong

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physique and mentality, he may seemingly escape paying the just penalty of his acts; and then the whole burden of expiation falls upon his children. And yet, mental suffering is not often paraded before the world; and a lawyer who has suborned witnesses and packed juries, who has bribed officials and falsified records, and thus balked justice, must be hardened indeed if he has no pangs of conscience, no bitter regrets that he has allowed himself, because of his greed, to become one of the worst enemies of mankind.

If the young lawyer, with a fair education and the determination to be a man of integrity, will but strive for the best there is in his profession, and above all else be true to all that is best in himself, he will, by degrees, get the confidence of the people of his community, and he cannot fail to become a strong character. Corporations may not hire him, but he will have the good opinion of his fellow-men and his own

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self-respect. He may not get rich in money, but he will be rich in the things money cannot buy. Such a man is much more to be envied than the man who amasses a fortune by questionable means.