
POLITICS

Participation in the conduct of public affairs should tend to make strength of character. Properly conducted, it involves investigation, discussion, and honorable contest; and, therefore, it should develop ability, industry, and ambition.

Earlier in the history of our country, active interest in politics did make strong and even great men. Office-holding should be a mark of distinction, a badge indicative of public confidence and of high character. And so it has been in the past. The people, needing someone to look after their interests, cast about for a man of ability and character, and commissioned him to serve them. Being thus selected, he enjoyed the confidence and esteem of the public; and he came to the discharge of his duties with a high sense of honor. Character, with him, stood above everything else. Moving along this line, he became strong and

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sometimes great. He was in fact the servant of the people. But the sad truth is that politics have degenerated; and there has developed a condition that is prone to sap the manhood of those who come within its atmosphere. With many politicians, the question is not how to get an honest expression of public sentiment, but how to avoid it, or how to trick the people and win in spite of them. They investigate, indeed, and they study industriously; but not along the line that makes great men. Their energies are spent in efforts at deception, trickery, and fraud. Such a line of conduct must have an evil effect upon those who practice it; and when we look at the man who is in politics solely for selfish purposes, we are convinced that the life he leads has written its infamy upon his countenance.

It would be difficult to find a class of men who possess less honor, less manhood, or less character, than the professional politician who

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has long manipulated local politics in large cities. Instead of the office seeking the man, the man pursues the office. Instead of being the choice of his fellow-citizens, the office-holder often simply fastens himself upon them and proceeds to eat their substance.

He is never guided by a principle, but is led by an appetite. He becomes smooth but hungry, and is constantly on the lookout for personal advantage. He is forever watching the weather-vanes, and shifting his position with their every move. He is all things to all men, an elusive and deceptive quantity, that grows smaller and weaker with every shift.

There was a time when the men in office led public sentiment, and the contest was intellectual and moral. With every contest they grow stronger. But the commercial interests began to control government for private ends. For this purpose, they sought to shape public sentiment, and they used commercial methods ;

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and the office-holders no longer led the public, nor were they simply followers, but they were side-door conveniences for commercial interests. They posed and strutted, it is true, as Congressmen, as Senators, as Governors, aye, as Judges; but they breathed the atmosphere of servitude. They bent to the winds of commercialism, which was laden with the poison of injustice.

For a third of a century there has been a dearth of great characters in American public life. In the various walks of private life there came to the front a race of giants, men who grew great because they were sincere. Today, the successful private individual is the *great* American, and both his front and his rear stairways are crowded with politicians and office-holders seeking his favors.