

Common People

BY

FRANK OLIVER HALL

"I will sing the song of Companionship."

—WHITMAN.



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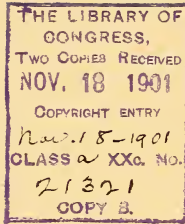
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Common People in Politics

Whoever hesitates to utter that which he thinks the highest truth, lest it should be too much in advance of the time, may reassure himself by looking at his acts from an impersonal point of view. . . . He, with all his capacities, and aspirations, and beliefs, is not an accident, but a product of the time. He must remember that while he is a descendant of the past, he is a parent of the future; and his thoughts are as children born to him, which he may not carelessly let die. . . . Not as adventitious therefore will the wise man regard the faith which is in him. The highest truth he sees he will fearlessly utter; knowing that, let what may come of it, he is thus playing his right part in the world — knowing that if he can effect the change he aims at — well: if not — well also, though not so well.

— *Herbert Spencer.*

Hail, spirit of revolt, thou spirit of life,
Child of eternal Love,
Love rebelling against lovelessness, life rebelling against
death!
Rise at last to the full measure of thy birthright;
Spurn the puny weapons of hate and oppression;
Fix rather thy calm, burning, protesting eyes on all the
myriad shams of man, and they will fade away
in thinnest air;
Gaze upon the gainsayers until they see and feel the truth
and love that begat and bore thee.
Thus and thus only give form and body to thy noble as-
pirations,
And we shall see done on earth as in heaven
God's ever living, growing, ripening will.

— *Ernest Crosby.*



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Common People in Politics



ONE of the burning political questions among the Jews at the time of Jesus had to do with taxation. The Roman empire had taken forcible possession of Palestine. Governors were appointed, and under these was a swarm of tax-gatherers who wrung from the hard hands of the people tribute for the government at Rome. The Jews hated the Romans. They did not want to give of their wealth to support the government that tyrannized over them. In this fact the Pharisees saw an opportunity to trick Jesus into a great difficulty. So they propounded this question: "Is it lawful to give tribute unto

Cæsar, or not?" It was a shrewd question, and one which seemed to bear inevitable evil consequences to the man who should answer it. If he replied, "Yes," he would incur the bitter hatred of the Jews, his countrymen. If he said, "No," he would lay himself open to a charge of treason against the Roman power. Jesus escaped from the difficulty by laying down, according to his usual method, a great and fundamental principle: "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's; and unto God the things that are God's."

That principle holds good for all time. Cæsar is dead; the great empire of Rome has disappeared; the principle of Jesus still lives. Suppose that the question had been put to Jesus in our time instead of in the days of the Roman empire. There are plenty of people to-day who believe just as little in the taxes which they are called upon to pay as the Jews believed in the tribute to Cæsar. There are hundreds of thousands who do not believe in the war still being carried on by our govern-

ment against the Filipinos. But recently, during a period of three years, every time a man sent a telegram he was compelled to contribute the price of two bullets to be fired against Filipino soldiers. Every time he sent an express-package he was obliged to contribute powder enough to send one of these bullets into a Filipino's heart. Every time he bought a bottle of cologne or a package of medicine he made a contribution for the support of a standing-army. On certain business-papers and in the case of particular manufactures the tax still continues. Suppose that Jesus were alive to-day, and one should go to him and say, "Master, is this stamp-tax just or not?" If Jesus should answer, "Yes," then he would incur the enmity of all who do not believe in the standing-army and the war in the Philippines. If he said, "No," he would incur the enmity of all those who believe in the policy of the government. What would Jesus say? "Show me a piece of money." Some one places in his hand a cent. "What inscription

is this?" "The United States of America." "Render unto the United States the things that belong to the United States; and to God the things that belong to God." Or, to make it more general, "Render unto government the things that belong to government; and to God the things that belong to God." Here you have the principle; each must apply it for himself.

What is politics? The word comes from the Greek word *polis*, which means *city*. Politics means the relation of the individual to the community, and of the community to the individual. Political duty is the duty which each one of us owes to all of us, and all of us owe to each one of us. More specifically, it has to do with the relation of the citizen to the government, and of the government to the citizen. Let us consider the duty of the individual to the State.

What, then, is the first duty of the citizen toward the State, involved in this fundamental principle of Jesus?

Obviously, the principle involves that a man should pay his taxes for the support of government, pay the whole of them, pay them justly, pay them cheerfully. Right here we put our finger upon one of the besetting sins of the present day. No form of dishonesty is more prevalent than that of "tax-dodging." And the worst aspect of the situation is that men laugh about it, and treat the matter as a huge joke. If a man, by a shrewd trick, can get his property-valuation cut down so that he pays \$500 where he ought to pay \$1000, he is very likely to call his intimate friends together, as did the woman in the parable who had found a piece of silver that was lost. He makes a supper, and says in a whisper, with a self-gratulatory smile, "Rejoice with me, — I have dodged my taxes." Men and women who would resent being called dishonest or untruthful, and who in the ordinary course of their lives are most strict in their integrity, do not hesitate to misrepresent their possessions to the assessor in order to avoid paying

their just proportion of governmental expense. Men who are most scrupulous to pay the debts which they owe to individuals undertake in every way to avoid paying the debts which they owe to the State. But when we remember that the State is only "all of us," it is most difficult to see why it is any less dishonest to avoid paying the debt to "all" than it would be to avoid paying a debt to one.

I saw a party of boys coasting. They all enjoyed the slide down the hill on a great, heavy, double sled. It was not so much pleasure hauling the sled back to the top. I noticed that some of the boys, the moment the sled reached the bottom of the hill, would lay hold on the rope ready to do their share of the pulling back. I liked those boys. But there were two, who, when the sled stopped, began to exercise their ingenuity to avoid the burden of the return trip. One pretended to have sprained his ankle, and, of course, he could not be expected to pull. A second became so interested in something at the

bottom of the hill that the sled was half-way up before he realized it. Then he had to run to catch up. He reached the top just in time to select a comfortable place for the ride down. Smart? Yes, very. As smart as the tricks of some grown men. But, somehow, I do not like that kind of a boy.

What is a tax? It is doing one's share of pulling the sled up the hill. There is a road to be built. The old-fashioned way, when society was primitive, was for every able-bodied man in the community to turn out and help in the construction of the road which was for the benefit of all. When society became more complex, it was found inexpedient to work in this manner. One would say, "I cannot afford the time from my bench, or my loom, or my store, or my office, to work on the road. I will hire a man to take my place." So "all of us" agreed to that method. He is not a man worthy of respect who, after a few years, not only refuses to do his share of the work personally, but tries to avoid paying some one

to take his place in the construction of new roads. The money which one pays as a tax presumably goes toward doing his share of the work in the general improvement of the community, building roads, making a bridge, constructing a reservoir. Let every man do his share by rendering unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's.

The second duty which a man owes to the State, that is, which "one of us" owes to "all of us," and which may be deduced from this saying of Jesus, is obedience. It is not enough for a man to say, in excuse for disobedience, that he does not believe in certain laws. His individual opinion does not exempt him from the necessity for obedience, unless this law directly conflicts with what he conscientiously believes to be his duty to God.

I live in a community where the large majority of citizens have decided that the liquor-saloon shall not exist. A majority have said that the saloon is a nuisance and a menace to the best life of the city, and that we will

not have it. So there is a statute banishing the saloon and making it unlawful for any one to sell alcoholic liquors. But there are some thousands of citizens who do not believe that this is a good law. Many think that in banishing the saloon the majority have infringed upon the personal liberty of the minority. Shall this minority say, therefore, "We will not abide by this law; we will evade it in every possible way and patronize secret selling of liquor"? Nay, the person who does this, even though he may be confident that he has a right to drink liquor when and where he will, is an unworthy citizen.

Infringement of personal liberty, forsooth! All government is an infringement of personal liberty. A man alone by himself in a wilderness may be a law unto himself. He is perfectly free. The moment he comes from the wilderness and places himself in the midst of other people, he must submit to limitations of his freedom. In the wilderness he may wear what clothing he pleases, or none at all. In

civilized society he must conform to the customs of society. In the wilderness, apart from all human beings, he may live in an unsanitary dwelling, keep dynamite in his kitchen, set his house on fire and burn it to the ground, if he will. He is free. The moment he comes into the midst of a community of other people he must submit to infringements upon his freedom. This is the price he pays for the privilege of living in society. Therefore let a man abide by the laws. If he does not like them he is privileged to retreat to the wilderness; or as a citizen, as "one of us," he is privileged to do what he can to change the laws by getting "all of us" to think as he does. But in the meantime let him surrender his personal rights and abide by the will of "all of us" as expressed in the laws of the land.

There are many who do not believe in the laws of property. They are Communists, and believe that no one has a right to private possessions. By all means, let them try to convert the majority to their views; but in

the meantime let them obey the laws of property. There are many excellent men who do not believe in the laws relative to the private possession of land. To them the land belongs to God, and to society as a whole. By all means, let them try to convert the majority to their views. In the meantime let them surrender their individual rights, as they conceive them, and obey the laws of the land. He only is a worthy citizen who renders unto government the obedience which is its due.

A third duty which the citizen owes to the State is to make himself intelligent upon social questions. I have spoken about study, and emphasized the importance of becoming acquainted with the history of the world and the best literature of the ages. There is one department of study to which every citizen ought to give himself, and which is more important than either of these. He ought to study political and social questions, and be ready to give a reason for the opinions he holds, for the vote he casts. Conditions are

radically changed since the time of Jesus. In his day the people were one thing, Cæsar was another. The government was vested in an emperor and an aristocracy. The people had nothing to say about the making or the administration of the laws. That belonged to Cæsar. It mattered little, therefore, whether the people were intelligent upon matters of government or not. It was important that Cæsar should be intelligent and just, for the sake of the people. It was not important to Cæsar that the people should be intelligent. But we have reversed all that. The people are Cæsar. The people are the government. The ultimate authority of the law is in the will of the people. The administration of the laws is in the hands of the people. The very tribute-money is paid, not by the people to some foreign potentate, but by the people to themselves for the carrying on of their work. So it is important that the people should be intelligent upon questions of government, because they are the government.

What would you think of a king who undertook to rule the people and was ignorant of the very Constitution under which he ruled? What should we think of a king who took no pains to study the social life of his subjects? We at once recognize that such a king would be unworthy to rule. But we are the king. A citizen is unworthy to rule, — that is, he is unworthy to cast a vote, — unless he has first made an effort to become intelligent upon the subject which his vote helps to decide. We have somehow got the notion that a democratic form of government must be good, because it is democratic. But on the whole I would rather be governed by one ignorant and selfish sovereign than by a million ignorant and selfish sovereigns. A democracy where the majority are ignorant may be just as bad as an absolute monarchy where the monarch is ignorant.

This is the explanation and the justification of the common school system of the Republic. So great a man as Herbert Spencer contends

that compulsory education is an encroachment upon the authority that belongs to the parent. We have no right, he thinks, to say to a man, "You must send your child to school." We have no right to tell him to what kind of a school he must send his child, or dictate what that school shall teach. And yet, I doubt not that Mr. Spencer would admit that the people have a right to demand intelligence on the part of their rulers. It is because the people are the rulers in the Republic that we have a right to demand education for all. We have a right to say that every child shall attend the public school, or some school just as good; we have a right to dictate that the schools shall teach certain things, because we have a right to demand intelligence on the part of our rulers.

So the public school exists for the purpose of training our kings. We send a child to school in order that he may become intelligent and learn to think. We supply school-houses, school-books, teachers, for the purpose of

training boys for citizenship and girls to become mothers of citizens.

But suppose the boy, having been trained in the schools and taught to think, having been watched over and his faculties disciplined, refuses when he comes to the age of manhood and citizenship to use his knowledge and his trained faculties for the good of the State? Such a young man is a cheat. He is defrauding the State. He takes everything and gives nothing. There are thousands of such men who give their faculty and their energy simply to their own selfish ends, who devote their knowledge and their training to the accumulation of money or to the winning of pleasure. There are millions of Republicans who go to the polls and vote their party-ticket, and yet could give no intelligent reason why they do so or make an intelligent statement of the principles for which the party stands. There are millions of Democrats who know nothing about the history of the organization for which they vote or the platform which they support.

Here is a man who is a Democrat because his father was a Democrat. Here is another who votes the Republican ticket because most of the men in his "set" vote that ticket. Such a person has no moral right to vote at all. He only is a worthy citizen who gives himself to careful and unbiased consideration of the great problems which his vote helps to decide, and is able to cry, with Charles Sumner, "The slave of principle, I call no party master."

One of the most discouraging features of the age in which we live is the disinclination of young American citizens to give thoughtful and earnest attention to the social problems which they will be called upon to decide. There never was a time in the history of the world when so many political problems of great moment were up for consideration as at the present. Where are the young men who are studying them? To be sure, President Eliot reports that there is a great interest in social questions among the undergraduates at Harvard. But college men are an insignificant

minority of the young men of the land. In all Cambridge, so far as I know, there is only one organization, outside the college, which gives serious attention to the discussion of social questions, and that is made up of laboring-men. The laborers are more alive to the necessity of right opinions on social questions than any other class. You may hear more intelligent discussion of political problems at the Labor Unions than anywhere else outside the college lecture-rooms. The old-fashioned debating-club is dead. The lyceum has degenerated into a variety show. Men are interested in private clubs, bowling, billiards and foot-ball. Where are the men who are supremely interested in the problems of society? Wake up, young men! Within the next twenty-five years questions will come up for your decision that will bear upon the whole future life of the Republic, and so of the world. Yea, such questions are already here. Every worthy citizen will make all sacrifice of ease and pleasure to become intelligent upon political

questions which his vote must hope to decide.

A fourth duty which the citizen owes to the State is expressed in the word patriotism. He owes his country his love. Now, when we begin to talk about patriotism we are likely immediately to think of swords and rifles, waving flags and gattling-guns. What is a patriot? A man who lies behind a breast-work and undertakes to shoot some other man to death? A man who charges up a hill and perhaps lies down and dies on the slope? No, that is not patriotism. That may be one of the manifestations of patriotism, or it may be only a manifestation of bull-dog ferocity, of brutal and degrading lust for a fight. There are men who go drifting around the world looking for a fight. This month you will find such men fighting in South Africa; it makes little difference to them whether they are on the side of the British or of the Boers. They would like to be on the winning side, but the main thing is to fight. Next

month you may find the same men fighting in China. The merits of the question do not trouble them. They like to fight. It is a degradation of the word to call such men patriots. As well call a bloodhound a patriot. To love one's country, to be ready in emergency to die for one's country, to be ready above all to live for one's country,—that is patriotism.

There are those who would have us believe that if war should be abolished patriotism and heroism would cease. Nothing of the kind would happen. With the abolition of war we should enter upon a saner idea of patriotism. We should be able to see that the men who build the railroads for the glory of their country, the men who clear the wilderness and make it blossom like the rose, the men who till the soil so that their fellows may be fed, the scholars who study the needs of the hour, the teachers who guide the minds of the young,—all these are the true patriots and are giving their lives for the welfare of their country.

It is time also for us to understand that it is not necessary, in order that a man may love his country, that he should hate some other country. Must I, in order to love Massachusetts, hate New York? Must I, in order to love America, hate Spain? The largest and best patriotism is that which will lead a man to say, "The world is my country; all humanity are my fellow-men." I can best serve humanity by serving the State in which I was born and where I live. But it is just as selfish and just as contemptible for a man to plan for the enrichment of his own country at the expense of another man's country as it is for him to plan for his own enrichment at the expense of his neighbor. "Thou hast heard that it has been said," translates Tolstoi, "Thou shalt love thy countryman and hate a foreigner; but I say unto you, Love foreigners, and pray for them that persecute you, that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven."

"I am a man," said Terence, "and nothing

human is foreign to me." Noble statement ! Let us not reverse it and say, "I am an American, and nothing foreign is human to me."

Again, it is the duty of the citizen to express his opinion as to the government under which he lives, if he has an opinion to express. There is a power in public opinion even where the expression of it is discouraged. It was so powerful in Palestine at the time of Jesus that the great Cæsar himself did not care to brave it. Public opinion in our day is powerful to influence such unlimited monarchies as Russia and China. But with us here in America public opinion is the supreme force. We provide a method for the expression of this opinion. This method is the ballot. The policy of our government being determined by public opinion, and each citizen being a part of the public, it becomes the duty of each first to have an opinion and then to express it. The man who can vote and who does not vote ought to be banished to Russia or to China where such opportunity is

not given to the citizen. Our forefathers fought, suffered, sacrificed, died, that you and I might have the right to express our opinion through the ballot. Shame to the man who refuses to sacrifice an hour from his business or his pleasure in order that he may exercise the privilege to gain which his ancestors willingly laid down their lives.

But the mere casting of a ballot is not the whole duty of the citizen. Every true citizen will be an agitator. What he believes he will try to make others believe. We hear many sneers and much condemnation against agitators. But if you look back and pick out the men whose names we most love to honor, you will discover that they were agitators. Samuel Adams and Patrick Henry were agitators. Phillips and Garrison and Sumner and Whittier were agitators. Yea, to go back into ancient history, you will recall that the inhabitants of Thessalonica cried concerning the great apostle Paul and his faithful disciples, "These that have turned the world upside down are come

hither also." Every man who believes anything should agitate until he has been proved wrong or until his truth has been accepted. That is a man's simple duty.

And the final duty of the citizen of which I shall speak is, on occasion, to break the laws, resist the government, defy authority! I have said that it is the citizen's duty to obey. Ordinarily that is true, even to the sacrifice of his personal rights and opinions. But there may come a time when it is his duty to disobey. There is a higher law—the law of Righteousness. "Render under God the things that are God's," said Jesus. There was once a man named Daniel, who lived in a State where there was a law against praying to Daniel's God. He threw his window open toward Jerusalem, and prayed so that all might hear, and braved the consequences. All honor to Daniel! There was once a law which declared that every ounce of tea used by the American colonists should pay a tax to a foreign power. The colonists made a tea-pot of

Boston harbor. They broke the law. All honor to the colonists! There was once a law that said if any Negro slave escaped from bondage every citizen of a free State was under obligation to hunt him down and return him to his owner. And there were men who not only broke this law but broke the doors of jails where Negroes were confined and aided them to escape. All honor to Parker and Garrison and Higginson for refusing obedience and breaking the law!

The time may come in your life or mine when our duty to Right, to the high law of God, may demand of us that we disobey and even forcibly resist the laws of the State. When that day comes there ought to be no hesitation on our part. But there should always be a noble motive. Let him who breaks the law of the land do so only in obedience to the higher law of eternal justice and divine righteousness. "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, but to God the things that are God's."