

of acquaintances, especially among the "loafer" class who have votes but no reason for using them one way more than another, and whose interest in political issues is therefore as limited as their stock of political knowledge. But he may have started as a lawyer of the lowest kind, or lodging-house keeper, or have taken to politics after failure in store-keeping. The education of this class is only that of the elementary schools: if they have come after boyhood from Europe, it is not even that. They have of course no comprehension of political questions or zeal for political principles; politics mean to them merely a scramble for places or jobs. They are usually vulgar, sometimes brutal, not so often criminal, or at least the associates of criminals. They it is who move about the populous quarters of the great cities, form groups through whom they can reach and control the ignorant voter, pack meetings with their creatures.

Their methods and their triumphs must be reserved for a later chapter. Those of them who are Irish, an appreciable proportion in great cities, have seldom Irish patriotism to redeem the mercenary quality of their politics. They are too strictly practical for that, being regardful of the wrongs of Ireland only so far as these furnish capital to be used with Irish voters. Their most conspicuous virtues are shrewdness, a sort of rough good-fellowship with one another, and loyalty to their chiefs, from whom they expect promotion in the ranks of the service. The plant thrives in the soil of any party, but its growth is more vigorous in whichever party is for the time dominant in a given city.

English critics, taking their cue from American pessimists, have often described these men as specimens of the whole class of politicians. This is misleading. The men are bad enough both as an actual force and as a symptom. But they are confined to a few great cities, those eleven or twelve I have already mentioned; it is their achievements there, and particularly in New York, where the mass of ignorant immigrants is largest, that have made them famous.

In the smaller cities, and in the country generally, the minor politicians are mostly native Americans, less ignorant and more respectable than these last-mentioned street vultures. The bar-keeping element is represented among them, but the bulk

are petty lawyers, officials, Federal as well as State and county, and people who for want of a better occupation have turned office-seekers, with a fair sprinkling of store-keepers, farmers, and newspaper men. The great majority have some regular avocation, so that they are by no means wholly professionals. Law is of course the business which best fits in with politics. They are only a little below the level of the class to which they belong, which is what would be called in England the lower middle, or in France the *petite bourgeoisie*, and they often suppose themselves to be fighting for Republican or Democratic principles, even though in fact concerned chiefly with place hunting. It is not so much positive moral defects that are to be charged on them as a sordid and selfish view of politics and a laxity, sometimes amounting to fraud, in the use of electioneering methods.

These two classes do the local work and dirty work of politics. They are the rank and file. Above them stand the officers in the political army, the party managers, including the members of Congress and chief men in the State legislatures, and the editors of influential newspapers. Some of these have pushed their way up from the humbler ranks. Others are men of superior ability and education, often college graduates, lawyers who have had practice, less frequently merchants or manufacturers who have slipped into politics from business. There are all sorts among them, creatures clean and unclean, as in the sheet of St. Peter's vision, but that one may say of politicians in all countries. What characterizes them as compared with the corresponding class in Europe is that their whole time is more frequently given to political work, that most of them draw an income from politics and the rest hope to do so, that they come more largely from the poorer and less cultivated than from the higher ranks of society, and that they include but few men who have pursued any of those economical, social, or constitutional studies which form the basis of politics and legislation, although many are proficient in the arts of popular oratory, of electioneering, and of party management.

They show a high average level of practical cleverness and versatility, and a good deal of legal knowledge. They are usually correct in life, for intoxication as well as sexual immorality is condemned by American more severely than by

European opinion, but are often charged with a low tone, with laxity in pecuniary matters, with a propensity to commit or to excuse jobs, with a deficient sense of the dignity which public office confers and the responsibility it implies. I shall elsewhere discuss the validity of these charges, and need only observe here that even if the last thirty years have furnished some grounds for accusing the class as a whole, there are many brilliant exceptions, many leading politicians whose honour is as stainless and patriotism as pure as that of the best European statesmen. In this general description I am simply repeating what non-political Americans themselves say. It is possible that with their half-humorous tendency to exaggerate they dwell too much on the darker side of their public life. My own belief is that things are healthier than the newspapers and common talk lead a traveller to believe, and that the blackness of the worst men in the large cities has been allowed to darken the whole class of politicians as the smoke from a few factories will darken the sky over a whole town. However, the sentiment I have described is no doubt the general sentiment. "Politician" is a term of reproach, not merely among the "superfine philosophers" of New England colleges, but among the better sort of citizens over the whole Union. "How did such a job come to be perpetrated?" I remember once asking a casual acquaintance who had been pointing out some scandalous waste of public money. "Why, what can you expect from the politicians?" was the surprised answer.

Assuming these faults to exist, to what causes are they to be ascribed? Granted that politics has to become a gainful profession, may it not still be practised with as much integrity as other professions? Do not the higher qualities of intellect, the ripe fruits of experience and study, win for a man ascendancy here as in Europe? Does not the suspicion of dishonour blight his influence with a public which is itself at least as morally exacting as that of any European country? These are questions which can be better answered when the methods of party management have been described, the qualities they evoke appreciated, their reaction on men's character understood.

It remains to speak of the non-professional or Outer Circle politicians, those who work for their party without desiring

office. These men were numerous and zealous shortly before and during the Civil War, when the great questions of the exclusion of slavery from the Territories and the preservation of the Union kindled the enthusiasm of the noblest spirits of the North, women as well as men. No country ever produced loftier types of dauntless courage and uncompromising devotion to principle than William Lloyd Garrison and his fellow-workers in the Abolitionist cause. Office came to Abraham Lincoln, but he would have served his party just as earnestly if there had been no office to reward him.¹ Nor was there any want of high-souled patriotism in the South. The people gave their blood freely, and among the leaders there were many who offered up fine characters as well as brilliant talents on an altar which all but themselves deemed unhallowed. When these great issues were finally settled, and the generation whose manhood they filled began to pass away, there was less motive for ordinary citizens to trouble themselves about public affairs. Hence the professional politicians had the field left free; and as they were ready to take the troublesome work of organizing, the ordinary citizen was contented to be superseded, and thought he did enough when he went to the poll for his party. Still there are districts where a good deal of unpaid and disinterested political work is done. In some parts of New England, New York, and Ohio, for instance, citizens of position bestir themselves to rescue the control of local elections from the ward politicians. In the main, however, the action of the Outer Circle consists in voting, and this the ordinary native citizen does more steadily and intelligently than anywhere in Europe, unless perhaps in Switzerland. Doubtless much of the work which Outer Circle politicians do in Europe is in America done by professionals. But that lively interest in politics which the English Outer Circle feels, and which is not felt, save at exceptional moments, by the English public generally, is in America felt by the bulk of the nation, that is to say, by the large majority of native white Americans, and even by the better sort of immigrants, or, in other words, the American

¹ Lincoln was never a professional politician, for he continued to practise as a lawyer till he became President: but he was so useful to his party that for some years before 1860 he had been obliged to spend great part of his time in political work, and probably some would have called him a professional.

Outer Circle comes nearer to including the whole nation than does the Outer Circle of England. Thus the influence which counterworks that of professionals is the influence of public opinion expressing itself constantly through its countless voices in the press, and more distinctly at frequent intervals by the ballot-box. I say "counterworks," because, while in Europe the leaders and still more the average legislators share and help to make public opinion, in the United States the politician stands rather outside, and regards public opinion as a factor to be reckoned with, much as the sailor regards the winds and currents that affect his course. His primary aim, unless he be exceptionally disinterested, is place and income: and it is in this sense that he may be described as a member of a definite profession.

CHAPTER LVIII

WHY THE BEST MEN DO NOT GO INTO POLITICS

"BUT," some one will say, who has read the reasons just assigned for the development of a class of professional politicians, "you allow nothing for public spirit. It is easy to show why the prize of numerous places should breed a swarm of office-seekers, not so easy to understand why the office-seekers should be allowed to have this arena of public life in a vast country, a free country, an intelligent country, all to themselves. There ought to be patriotic citizens ready to plunge into the stream and save the boat from drifting towards the rapids. They would surely have the support of the mass of the people who must desire honest and economical administration. If such citizens stand aloof, there are but two explanations possible. Either public life must be so foul that good men cannot enter it, or good men must be sadly wanting in patriotism."

This kind of observation is so common in European mouths as to need an explicit answer. The answer is two-fold.

In the first place, the arena is not wholly left to the professionals. Both the Federal and the State legislatures contain a fair proportion of upright and disinterested men, who enter chiefly, or largely, from a sense of public duty, and whose presence keeps the mere professionals in order. So does public opinion, deterring even the bad men from the tricks to which they are prone, and often driving them, when detected in a serious offence, from place and power.

However, this first answer is not a complete answer, for it must be admitted that the proportion of men of intellectual and social eminence who enter public life is smaller in America than it has been during the present century in each of the free countries of Europe. Does this fact indicate a want of public spirit?