# HEALING THE BODY POLITIC

By

### PRINCIPAL JOHN MACKAY, D.D.

Westminster Hall, Vancouver, B.C.

(Reprinted from The Westminster)

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HAT wise old sage and master statesman. Yuan Shi Kai, who is guiding China through its most critical period with marked success, has shown his farsighted wisdom in nothing more than in the law against political corruption recently passed by his order. This law provides that any one in public office who accepts a bribe of five hundred dollars or more shall be punished with death, and those guilty of lesser crimes of this nature shall be punished with great severity. One of the first offenders was a very prominent official who was a lifelong friend of the President. After giving him a fair trial, though moved to tears in sympathy for his friend, Yuan Shi Kai ordered him away to immediate execution and refused to be seen by any one till all was over, lest he should fail in what he believed and rightly believed, to be a life and death matter to his country.

With all seriousness, I beg to commend this law to the people of Canada, death penalty and all. It is true that the first year of its operation, especially if it were retroactive, would leave us minus a considerable number of knights and honorables and a little army of good (?) fellows who have made things pleasant for themselves and the purchasable element of the populace, with our money. However, I feel confident that we would be able to exist quite well, were they gone "to their own place."

This may seem like a bloodthirsty sentiment for a minister of the gospel of love, but the highest things in our national life are being done to death by political corruption and low political ideals and nothing but tragically drastic penalties can rouse the dormant conscience of our people and scare into decency those who are now fattening at the expense of the moral health of our young nation.

It is scarcely possible to exaggerate the danger to our future as a great nation of the political debauchery which disgraces almost every part of our country, from Atlantic to Pacific. At least two of our Provincial Governments are a travesty on representative institutions and a disgrace to any civilized country.

It is significant of the low state of public morality in another of our older provinces, that a man found guilty of extortion and political corruption in an important provincial office, has resigned that office perforce, but now proposes to run for a Dominion constituency, with good hopes of success. Had we any political morality worth speaking of, such a man would never again be considered for any position of public trust.

In a notorious western election case, the man who resigned his seat rather than face an investigation of the methods by which he won it, was re-elected by the same methods and now occupies a seat among our law-makers. Another equally notorious eastern election case has been dragged along until it is more than likely that a new election will be held before it comes to trial.

Not only have we numbers of men in public life who resort to bribery, but there are armies of men, respectable in every other way, yet always ready for a bribe. I know of one staid and prosperous farming community, whose citizens are nearly all connected with some church, yet he vast majority of them expect to be paid five or ten dollars for loss of time in going to the polls to vote. I hope this is an isolated instance, but have good reason to fear that it is not.

One would think that the present crisis which has brought out such a passionate display of loyalty both to the Empire and to the ideals for which she stands, would have prevented graft in the arrangements for sending our best young manhood to the front, but unfortunately such is not the case. Many of the articles which could have been bought directly from the manufacturers have been ordered through middlemen, and I know of instances where as much as twenty-five per cent. of the cost to the

Government has remained in the all too adhesive palms of these middlemen. The cabinet officials may not have been responsible for much of this, but the sordidness and the wire-pulling which have come under my own notice in what ought to be a holy cause if anything in the world is holy, have made me sick at heart.

The thing which has left China stationary through three thousand years has been this same sordidness and the elaborate system of squeeze by which a whole army of parasites sucked the life out of the people, as their own adage dramatically expresses it:

"Big fish eat little fish, little fish eat shrimps, and shrimps eat mud."

There must come a far-reaching moral and religious revival before China comes to her own, but that revival will be helped and hastened by every law which brings out the real hideousness of political corruption and its deadly effect on the national life.

The same thing is true of Canada. Our resources are so great and the prizes to be won by unscrupulous manipulators are so enormous that nothing but a determined uprising of all the decent forces of the country can save us from an orgy of corruption overshadowing anything which the great Republic to the south of us has ever known. Already we have politicians in Canada who could give points to Boss Tweed or Boss Croker in Tammany methods; already we have many men in high places who on entering politics were poor, but after a few years are ranked as millionaires. Here, too, we have groups of piratical promoters who have been given rights to immense natural resources and almost invaluable public utilities which belong to all the people and are being so exploited as to retard the progress of the country and heap unbearable burdens on those least able to bear them. great country in the modern history of the world was ever so completely in the grasp of a few men as we are already, and unless the churches and all other moral forces rouse themselves to the seriousness of the situation there are troublous times just ahead of Canada. I have travelled a good deal in England, Australia and the United States, during the past two years, and my cheeks have burned with shame as I heard high-minded, honorable men who wish us well, time after time express the opinion that we have fallen shockingly low in political morality. The other day, a great London daily, in reviewing Preston's book on Lord Strathcona, spoke in no uncertain language of the "devious ways" of Canadian politics.

Much of this evil condition came about while our people were still largely of Anglo-Saxon origin. How much greater is the peril now that we are receiving thousands of immigrants who know little of democracy and nothing of British ideals. If we are ever to be a homogeneous and well-governed country, these new citizens must be carefully trained and imbued at the beginning with the best ideals of our Empire. As it is, they are allowed the franchise after a few years' residence and their only training is given by the corrupt politician. In one well-known election in a foreign constituency in the West, enough railways, roads and bridges were promised to do for the whole province, options were taken for rights of way through hundreds of farms and money and whiskey flowed like water just before the election. What opinion must these people have of the great free land where they have come to make their homes and rear their families? What kind of citizens will their children make when reared in such an atmosphere?

When this ghastly war is over, we are bound to receive vast numbers of immigrants from war-cursed Europe. Are we going to allow these new citizens to be bedevilled by the corrupt politician or shall we learn from the socalled "heathen Chinee" and treat such a man as a traitor of the deepest dve? Peace has its perils no less than war. If a man who is a traitor in war time is shot like a dog, what ought to be done with traitors in times of peace? A traitor in times of war endangers the lives of some of his fellow citizens, but a corrupt politician rots away the moral fibre of a people, making them sodden cumberers of the ground, he endangers the security of property, pollutes all that is holy in society and endangers the safety of human life, and yet the corrupt politician grows fat and flourishes without let or hindrance in every part of Canada with which I am acquainted.

One great source of the evil is our blind partizanship; the more blind the less difference there is between the parties.

We are fortunate just now in having as Premier and Leader of the Opposition two men of untarnished character and of the highest honor, but both parties have always had too many men with neither character nor honor, who looked on public service as a source of private gain. The other day one of the finest citizens of a British Columbia city directed my attention to a man who was passing, and said: "There is one of the most unscrupulous men in all Canada. He seems to be quite devoid of moral sense. No one who knows him would believe him on oath and I would not trust him with a five-cent piece, yet he is likely to receive the nomination for the Dominion House and the Christian men of his party will vote for him." This was not spoken because of partizanship as both men are members of the same party.

We all know how many men were turned out of the last Liberal Cabinet for unworthy conduct. Yet even with so strong and honest a leader as Laurier the sinister element was rapidly gaining power, and, in my judgment, it was a good thing for the country as well as for the Liberal party that they were sent into opposition in 1011. Unfortunately, there is in the present Cabinet a man who is rapidly nullifying any good which might have come from a change, a man who would not be tolerated in any high office in a country where there was anything like political morality and who in so-called heathen China would have short shrift meted out to him. The only excuse I have ever heard given even by his own party for his presence there is his ability to win elections, but it is a sad commentary on the state of political morality to which we have fallen when a man who has debauched every constituency he has ever had anything to do with becomes the practical master of a great party simply because he can win elections. Yet one of the most Christian elders in the Presbyterian Church in Canada said in extenuation, "The other party does the same thing."

We as an Empire are up in arms against the code of morals which we facetiously describe as "Made in Germany." This code, or rather this negation of the moral code, "Necessity knows no law," was not made in Germany: it was made in hell and practised in Canada long before German thoroughness exposed it in all its naked ugliness for the execration of the world. And we are blatant hypocrites as well as arrant fools if we spend life and money without stint to crush the German war machine that professes this creed and leave untouched the political machines which practise it here in Canada.

Many men who are the soul of honor in their business dealings look upon graft as thoroughly justified if elections are won by it for the party. What is this but putting the real or fancied necessities of a party before the moral law.

We and our allies are fighting to the death, for what ? What but the principle that right is right and wrong is wrong always and everywhere, in national and world relations as well as in the individual life. Germany has committed the most ghastly crime against humanity that the world has ever known, simply because she has adopted the barbaric principle that the end justifies the means. that might or cunning or both makes right, that the ten commandments are all right for ordinary conventional relations where old ladies and weaklings move securely. but in big matters the mailed fist makes its own commandments; and Germany must be decisively defeated at whatever cost, or the world will return to barbarism. But German's madness, Germany's unspeakable crime, is no whit less evil than that of the man or the party which sets aside the ten commandments in election campaigns and substitutes for them the adage, "Whatever wins elections is right," and the nation which would live must crush without mercy the men and the institutions that menace the very foundations of society.

We show our barbaric simplicity and lack of understanding of the marvellous sensitiveness of the social organism, by hanging the murderer and granting the successful grafter a knighthood or some other high honor. The one violates the sanctity of the individual human life, the other violates every conceivable sanctity. He robs labor of its just reward and hands it over to the contemptible purchasable parasite, he encourages and abets the saloon and the brothel and everything that is mean and debasing in society, while in case after case, both in Canada and the United States, he has been responsible for the taking of human life. Democracy is a thing so complex and so sensitive that we can never hope to realize its inestimable advantages till we see that the worst crime that can be committed is to poison its very life blood by corrupt practices for individual or party advantage.

After fair opportunities of forming a judgment, I am forced with sorrow to the bitter and humiliating conclusion that the political life of Canada is the most sordid of the world's English-speaking communities. In at least two of our Provinces we have proved unworthy of representative institutions and are helpless in the hands of corrupt autocracies, and if the terrible ordeal through

which we are passing does not lead us to penitence and prayer for a rebirth of the national conscience and a sense of the sanctity of the institutions under which we live, we are not worthy of a place beside our august mother in the most holy cause she has ever espoused.

I hold no brief for any party, nor is this a plea for an attack on the parties that are in power in the different parts of the country, thus breaking the political truce which is so necessary to the successful prosecution of our present titanic task. It is a plea for individual heart-searching and for housecleaning within the different parties. Our material development has been so rapid that it has outstripped our spiritual growth. Our consciences have lain dormant while our acquisitive faculties have been over-stimulated. This is our God-given time to readjust things.

But how are we to begin? What can we do? First and foremost we can all study the meaning of democratic institutions and seek to see the significance of citizenship as we have never yet done. Then there are certain definite measures which must commend themselves to the good sense of all honest men.

We have in each party very many splendid men, but behind each party, at Ottawa, and in almost every constituency is a great machine composed too largely of the "practical (?) politicians," men who care little what becomes of the party and less for the fate of the country so long as they are "taken care of." They work behind the scenes, doing the dirty work which they take care to make appear as necessary as possible, while the decent men dance to the party tune these men call, excusing their misdeeds, if they win elections. If the decent men in each party would stop throwing mud at the other party long enough to see that this is a game arranged for them to play at by the corrupt element in their own party, to keep them too busy to enquire very closely into their doings, there would be many surprises for them. Each man is responsible primarily for what goes on in his own party and only secondarily for the other party. It is his duty to know everything that goes on in his party's councils. There is no more need of secrecy in the councils of political parties than there is in a prayer meeting, and every attempt at secrecy is prima facie evidence that something is wrong. What need has a political organization for secret funds, if not for corrupt purposes? It is the duty of every member of a political party to see that every dollar collected by his party organization is openly accounted for, that every act performed by its officers is officially reported and acted on by the organization they represent. Insist on publicity and absolute honesty in the councils of your own party and you will have taken the first step towards honest government and political purity in the nation. It is not necessary that any party should win elections in order to serve its country, but it is necessary if the nation is to become great that every party shall be above corruntion.

To secure this one of the first steps is to abolish partonage. No better device could be thought of to secure inefficiency and to debauch the electorate than the modern system of patronage. No public office should be looked on as a reward for party service, but as an opportunity of public service. Until the same standard of efficiency is demanded of state officials as applies to private employes, we shall always be controlled by the worst elements in the community and not by the best. The civil service commission is a start in the right direction, but it should have control of the outside service as well as the inside and should be carefully watched and strongly supported by all right-thinking citizens.

Then, too, there should be a limit set to the amount which any individual or corporation shall be allowed to contribute to the funds of any party. It is a well-known fact that in nine cases out of ten these contributions are given either for favors received or expected, and if they are limited in amount and an account open for the inspection of all has to be given of all party funds, one of the strongest incentives to corrupt practices by those in office will be done away with and time will be given to the decent statesman to do the real work for which he is elected.

As it is now concessions of immense value are given away to those who supply the sinews of war and in this way it is possible for small coteries of unscrupulous men to control the affairs of the nation to their own great enrichment but to its immeasurable injury. Contracts must be let by public tender and all concessions affecting the nation's wealth must be treated in the same way, or else the next decade is going to see a strong development of the anarchistic forces of the nation, due to the immense concentration of power in the hands of the few.

We must let the light into every corner of the public service. All through Canada are men who are growing rich by charging exorbitant prices for articles supplied to the Government. Here in British Columbia one man who had the purchasing patronage on certain lines under the Liberal Government induced a Conservative hangeron up in the north, who had neither capital nor business experience, to secure this same concession when the Conservatives came into power, and like the Vicar of Bray, the original grafter goes merrily on, charging the country exorbitant prices whatever party is in power, his profits just now being lessened by the rake-off which his northern partner receives. Could anything be more anomalous in a so-called civilized community than this secret tax imposed on all the people by a group of men whose only claim to it is the possession of a certain low type of cultting and an utter disregard for the first principles of citizenship? It ought to be possible at any moment for any citizen to ascertain the exact cost of any article or bit of service rendered the community, but as it is no one can find out. Why should we not have a monthly statement of all purchases made in every part of the world for our public service, with full details? Why should we not know what every bit of public improvement has cost down to a cent? The Public Accounts' Committee of the Province of British Columbia has not met for ten years and it is quite impossible to find out the full details of any expenditure of money. I believe the same thing is largely true in many respects throughout the country. Let every decent citizen throughout the land demand the right to know what is done with every cent of public funds which is expended. It is his money and he has a right to know all about it, and when he does know it will be easier for the honest politician to serve his country well and harder for the grafter to flourish as he is flourishing now at her expense.

Further, we need a new sense of the responsibility of citizenship. The right to vote makes every one who possesses it one of the governors of the nation and we must get over the delusion that all are born to this right. Every State has been increasingly claiming the right to say who shall govern her, and no one should be admitted to that high privilege who is not prepared to understand something of its meaning and its responsibilities. The right to vote should be placed on a new basis and given to men and women alike who pass

an examination showing that they have an intelligent grasp of the meaning of democratic institutions. A course of training in the principles of citizenship should form part of our public school system and only those who have graduated in this course should be given the franchise in the future

Then, too, we need a new sense of the heinousness of the crime of political corruption. As I have already shown, not even murder is so far-reaching in its demoralizing effects on the social organism, and yet we treat it as more or less of a joke. Were we under the control of a benevolent despot like Yuan Shi Kai who would be sure to carry out the law without fear or favor. I should unhesitatingly urge the infliction of the death penalty on those guilty of political corruption on a large scale. democracies have the unhappy characteristic of always being able to stir up a lot of maudlin sentiment for the criminal who faces death, forgetting entirely his victims and the danger which he is to the community. As we are, or think we are, a democracy, we must for our own salvation inflict the heaviest penalty upon the grafter which public sentiment can be educated to endorse, and we must carry that penalty out without mercy until men come to realize that it is not a light thing to trifle with that most sensitive and sacred thing in all our human existence, that impalpable and marvellously complex nexus of human lives we call the community or the state.

But no penalty and no number of expedients can suffice to save us apart from a revival in public opinion. The most potent deterrent to crime is always the force of public opinion. I know that many will bitterly resent some of the things I have written and will say that the time is inopportune for raising such issues. My only excuse is that I am prepared to substantiate every statement I have made and to produce an overwhelming mass of evidence to the same effect, and I am convinced that now is the day of national salvation.

It would be well if we could give our undivided attention to the war, unweakened by any sense of our own unworthiness to enter so holy a crusade. But that crusade is itself against the very same underlying principles which jeopardize our national life and it will not weaken but strengthen our support to the Motherland and her allies if we carry the crusade into every detail of our national life. This is the day of opportunity for the Church and

all holy forces. Ancient shams and conventional lies are being tried as if by fire. Nothing but righteousness can stand the test and if the Church does not rise to her opportunity she ought to give way for some institution with insight and passion born of God for the salvation of the nation.

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