The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

Founded by Edward C. Hegeler.

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CONTENTS:

PAGE

Frontispiece. The Kondo, Chief Sanctuary of the Horyuji near Nara, Japan.

National Politics in Its Psychological Aspect. Franklin A. Beecher 653

Confucianism, Buddhism, and Christianity. Benoy Kumar Sarkar 661

The Frescoes of the Horyuji. (With illustrations.) Harada Jiro 673

Bible Quotations and Chinese Customs. Julius J. Price 688

The Cosmos and Its Meaning. Frank R. Whitzel 693

Mr. Leonard's Fables. Traugott Boehme 709

"Savage Life and Custom." Peter Filo Schulte 712

Book Reviews 715

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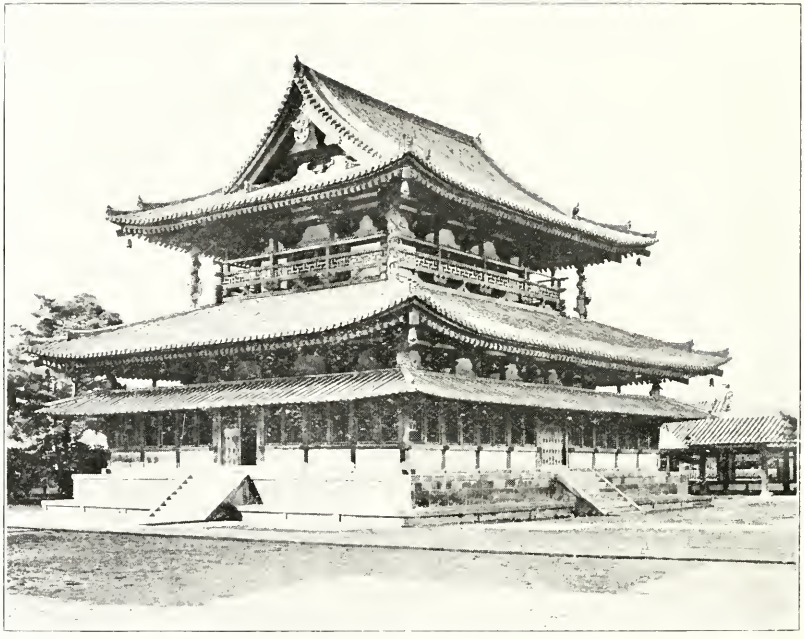

THE KONDO.

Chief sanctuary of the Horyuji near Nara, Japan.

Frontispiece to The Open Court.

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NATIONAL POLITICS IN ITS PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECT.

BY FRANKLIN A. BEECHER.

MAN'S psychical existence is made up of an unending stream of sense-perceptions and impressions, of sights, sounds, and feelings, of memories and judgments; and man is only stirred to action or reflection by these impressions when they hold his attention and are recognized by him as important for action. These impressions in the matured man do not fall upon virgin soil, but are predisposed in their interpretation to the beliefs and opinions formed in his previous experience, education, habits of mind, and his notion of personal interest. Thus, his accepted dogma, as well as his economic, political, religious, and social affinities are often obstacles that enter into the question as to his acceptance of a new view, for his beliefs, ideals, views of life and of the world largely influence his conduct. Some of our beliefs are founded upon tacit agreement, many others, on mere faith, and the reasons for most of them are never investigated or questioned by the individual, for we accept them on the "say so" of somebody else. Prof. William James wisely said: "....We all of us believe in democracy and progress,....and the duty of fighting for 'the doctrine of the immortal Monroe,' all for no reason worthy of the name. We see into these matters with no more inner clearness, and probably with much less, than any disbeliever in them might possess. His unconventionality would probably have some grounds to show for its conclusions, but for us, not insight, but the prestige of the opinions, is what makes the spark shoot from them and light up our sleeping magazines of faith."

These psychic elements of the individual find expression in the political conduct of the masses. The proposition may be made that

what is psychologically true of the individual is essentially psychologically true of the collective. The binding tie that holds these units together in the aggregate, or the individual in the collective, is the national consciousness, founded upon association, the result of affection, sympathy, and imitation, or from a political standpoint, the result of love of country, common interests, and the desire of likeness.

Since government, from a psychological standpoint, has its source largely in the desire and ambition of man to control his fellowmen and to have them live according to his way of thinking, it follows that politics, in a narrow sense, is the psychology of government. The old political doctrine of intellectualism, founded upon the primitive psychology of common sense, that man acts solely from self-interest is fallacious and contrary to the teaching of modern psychology, for the psychological fact is well established that a large number of his acts are done unconsciously and involuntarily, and therefore without foresight. In a social as well as in a political sense man is a custom-making animal, and there is a strong inclination in his nature to persist in repeating what he has once done, and the tendency to repeat the action increases with the number of repetitions. Furthermore, there is a strong tendency in man to make others do so, without their questioning their own interests, and, owing to this tendency in man to imitate others, little compulsion is required to make him respond to suggestion.

Suggestion, as applied to the domain of politics, may be used: (1) as stimulation by association, i. e., the suggestion is based upon the doctrine of association of ideas; (2) as the transmission of an idea by hint, intimation, or insinuation; (3) as a means of modifying and creating belief. Suggestion has been defined by Prof. Baldwin to be the abrupt entrance from without into consciousness of an idea or image which becomes a part of the stream of thought and tends to produce the muscular and volitional effects which ordinarily would follow upon its presence. Suggestion may be divided into direct and indirect. Direct suggestion is more efficacious upon a crowd already under the influence of a dominant will, while indirect suggestion is more effective between individuals. Thus the process may be described in general as follows. When the suggestion of an idea is made, it is born and falls in a network of emotions, traditions, and beliefs, of which the individual mind cannot easily divest itself. For this reason it meets with opposition and resistance at first. Then, by continued affirma-

tive repetition of the suggestion, the idea begins to be tolerated, when it spreads like contagion in the consciousness of individuals until it enters the stream of popular consciousness and seeks prestige in the popular mind through discussion, by which means it becomes transformed into popular opinion. This transformation takes effect oftentimes without discussion, which depends upon the nature of the subject-matter of the idea and the manner of its suggestion. In the formation of this opinion, reason does not always predominate, for emotional ideas are more readily spread than ideas of an intellectual nature.

Political action is seldom the result of well-reasoned conduct. In illustration of this process the instance of the Blaine-Cleveland campaign will prove interesting. This campaign was bitterly fought on personal lines as well as otherwise. Blaine was charged with being a Catholic, which he vigorously denied, vindicating himself by obtaining from his wife's priest a certificate that he was not a Catholic. He was further charged with impropriety as to financial transactions while in the service of the government. For this reason, public opinion, particularly in New York, was strongly against him. To check this trend of public opinion a counter-suggestion was made by a party of clergymen calling upon him for the purpose of showing that the pulpit had not lost confidence in his integrity. But at this meeting a minister by the name of Burchard unfortunately threw out the suggestion that Blaine was fighting rum, Romanism, and rebellion, meaning thereby that the Democratic party was the party of rum, Romanism, and rebellion. The suggestion fell upon fertile soil. The hostile press took it up and spread it broadcast. No denial could stem the tide. It contributed to Blaine's defeat.

The suggestion in itself was slanderous, but lies and slanderous statements in political campaigns are frequently successful for the purposes intended. In the Jackson-Adams campaign—the so-called campaign of lies—the suggestion of the false idea was thrown out that Henry Clay had sold his political strength for the cabinet position of Secretary of State, which was untrue. This suggestion was reenforced by John Randolph exclaiming in Congress: "Let Judas take his thirty pieces of silver." Counter-suggestions of false ideas were made, yet the campaign lies favored Jackson, who was elected.

In more recent times, it has been the policy of campaign managers to hold some false ideas or slanderous statements back, usually based upon half or distorted truths, ready for suggestion at the

closing moments of a campaign, for the purpose of forestalling any discussion or vindication of the party accused. Oftentimes discussion and arguments are futile against a suggestion of an idea, whether based upon falsehood or truth, that appeals to the natural prejudices of mankind or those of a class. Reason seldom sways the masses. It is usually a subtle suggestion or a change of temper in the masses which brings results in the political field. Discussion may offset the effects of a forcible suggestion of an idea. Thus, when Bryan, in the Democratic convention of 1896, made the suggestion of the idea of the cross of gold by exclaiming: "We will answer their demand for a gold standard by saying to them: 'You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns—you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold,'" the immediate effect was overwhelming. It spread with increasing rapidity, and there is no question that if the election had taken place the day following this outburst, Bryan would have been elected president, in fact for some time after, but discussion after a while caused a change of sentiment. However, it is difficult to say how much is due to discussion for change of sentiment and how much due to money, for money plays an important part in political campaigns.

The suggestion was the climax of an oration. It appealed to the emotions, and therefore found fertile soil for the rapid contagion. It was sentiment, lacking logic. How the suggestion of an emotional idea may change the tide of sentiment, based upon vituperation and calumny, is demonstrated when Cleveland was first nominated for the presidency. During the session of the convention a Tammany leader delivered a tirade against Cleveland. But when General Bragg in his reply threw out the suggestion of the idea by exclaiming: "We love Cleveland for the enemies he has made," enthusiasm became contagious and spread rapidly.

The suggestion by means of advertising is well illustrated in the McKinley-Bryan campaign when the idea of the "full dinner-pail and what it meant" was diffused by large posters being placarded on billboards. The effect was convincing.

The fickleness of the popular mind is well presented in the convention that nominated Garfield. A strong effort was made to nominate Grant. The leaders representing Grant's interests had arranged to pack the galleries with the veterans of the Civil War. It was then that Conklin, who championed Grant's cause, threw out the suggestion that every delegate of the convention should bind himself to support the nominee of the convention, which was enthusiastically received by the convention. A counter-suggestion

was made by a delegate from Virginia, of the idea that he could not bind himself or his colleagues until he had consulted with his constituents. This suggestion was met with groans and hisses until Garfield in a vigorous speech full of suggestion defended the position of the delegate,—and the current of the popular mind was changed. Conklin tried to stem it by further counter-suggestions, but was hissed and forced to stop. Or take the Dewey instance. The suggestions produced by his actions in the war proclaimed him a hero. The enthusiasm aroused in the American people was so great that they would have bestowed upon him the highest office of the land, irrespective of the question whether he was fitted for it or not. But later, when the people made him a present of a home, and he transferred it to his newly-wedded wife, popular sentiment changed, and he became as unpopular as he was popular after the battle of Manila Bay.

The popular mind or consciousness is susceptible to suggestion when the ideas thrown out fall within the subject-matter agitating the popular mind. Individuals, groups, classes, communities, and nations live in a continuous stream of suggestions, emanating from various sources. But it is only those suggestions which hold the attention of the popular mind that may take effect and stimulate popular opinion, for the suggestion of ideas which run counter to the common prejudices, traditions, and customs of a people are generally ineffectual, at least momentarily. Momentarily—because if the suggestion of an idea is thrown out in advance of its age, it may lie dormant, or take root and germinate in secret, shaping the unconscious mind of a few individuals of the next generation who disseminate the idea more widely. When the hour has come, and the man, action is taken, making it expedient to modify popular opinion as to common prejudices, beliefs, traditions, customs, and governmental policies. But if the suggestion accords with, or is allied to, the subject-matter which occupies the popular mind, popular opinion may be formed instantaneously without agitation or discussion; while on the other hand, if the suggestion is incongruous with the spirit of the times, popular opinion may be formed only by agitation and discussion.

Free speech, free assemblage, and free press are the means by which the characteristics of the popular mind are changed and popular opinion is modified by creating a new spirit of the times. Popular opinion is transitory and is formed upon a concrete case, while the spirit of the times is more stable and lasting, being abstract and general in content. It is owing to this fact that the spirit

of the times during any decade in the nation's history may be isolated and investigated. The prevailing thought may be analyzed for the purpose of finding its temper and style, also the mode of discussion which caused the change of thought. It is by means of free discussion that all subjects are brought in the limelight, for nowadays there is no subject too sacred for discussion, nor is there anything of concern to human beings which may not be profitably discussed in the right spirit, by the right person at the right time. But it is not infrequent that the impulsive desire in man to control others and have them live according to what he considers the right standard of living, and his desire for them to adopt his world-views, should under the present freedom of discussion where no subject is barred, give rise to absurdities and inconsistencies in his demands which are apt to create an irrational and intolerant public opinion, one that defies the fundamental principles of our government.

A nation is made up of groups of all kinds. In general they may be classified into political, social, religious, ethical, scientific, and economic types, but all of them are pervaded, more or less, with economic considerations for the reason that economics is the basis of the order of organized society, and the principles, doctrines, and creeds they advocate or stand for, are frequently even dominated by economic considerations. Especially is this fact true of the subgroups of these types, so that their principles, doctrines, and creeds lack at times that free expression and force which is so essential to gain prestige in the popular mind. The psychic aspects of the subgroups of these types may be competitive, antagonistic, or harmonious. In some instances even the general types may be antagonistic. The views held by some of these subgroups may be antagonistic to the political organization of the government. Thus, as merely illustrative and irrespective of the merits of the controversy, the quotation from the opinion of a prominent judge rendered many years ago will be to the point: "And it is a matter to me of deep regret, to see the citizens of age, intellect, and influence, and among them moral and religious teachers, so far forget their duty as such citizens, and so far lose sight of the great value of our constituted system of government and the fundamental principles of the Christian religion, as to enter into the political contest, touching the adoption of the act in question, openly proclaiming that they did not care whether the act was constitutional or not: they were determined to support and enforce it; if it was unconstitutional, the judges would not dare to declare it so for the act could be carried at the ballot box by ten thousand majority. Such a doctrine is of

evil tendency, and treasonable in principle. It is the open inculcation of a total disregard of established government and fundamental laws, and if persisted in, must have a most pernicious influence, especially among the rising generation. Such conduct is in the highest degree reprehensible, and should ever be reprobated and condemned, and the perpetrators spurned as traitors to their government, and enemies to the best interests of their fellowmen." Another illustration of views held by individuals and some subgroups is here given by a recent occurrence where a minister publicly charged a public school teacher with improper conduct, and when called upon by the properly constituted authorities to submit the facts, he refused, under the pretext, the purport of which was, that he was only amenable to his God for what he said concerning the charges against the teacher.

Among the political types there are subgroups such as the anarchists, who are opposed to all government, and such as the socialists, who are antagonistic to the economic or industrial order or system of organized society.

Again there are those of the economic-type subgroup of organized capital who are antagonistic to organized labor in the endeavor to better its condition. Labor, in turn, opposes all efforts to further the interest of organized capital. Special interests of all sorts of social, religious, and economic subgroups are opposed to reforms and changes in their condition.

Among individuals, it has been said that there are those who hold the view as to economic reform that successful crime in the commercial world should not be condemned because it was successful, that the trader should not be scourged but only coaxed out of the temple, that peace is more desirable than purity. Others there are who believe that whatever is must continue to be, and who are constitutionally averse to all reforms because they involve changes and readjustments which are inconvenient.

Thus, an effort has been made to give a cursory psychological view of the attitude and contents of the individual and popular minds in their relation to political matters and government. In the practical carrying-out of the political schemes and policies the electors are the elemental factor. They consist of native and naturalized citizens. The naturalized citizen must usually remodel his national consciousness and his political conceptions before he can grasp the spirit of our government and become an independent elector. It is for this reason that he is more easily led during the formative period than the native-born citizen.

There are about one third of the qualified electors who exercise their elective franchise, and of these only one sixth vote intelligently. A larger number of the remaining two thirds, among whom are some of the leading and best citizens, do not exercise their rights because they are not interested, and if they vote, they do so without any consideration of the act. Again, there are quite a number of electors who are so engrossed in their businesses and making money that they have no time to attend to their political duties; while another class are so busy in providing for themselves and families that they cannot devote their time to political duties. Under these circumstances it is not to be wondered that the average voter has no clear insight into political questions, nor into the nature of our government and its political principles, and therefore he is a good subject for the suggestive treatment by unscrupulous politicians, who have no compunctions of how they attain their ends. It is clear that under such conditions the professional politicians and political bosses thrive, for the masses of the voters do not think, they are led. Ignorance of the nature of our government, indifference to it, the selfish interest of a class who have no regard for the welfare of others, and the lack of individual thinking and action, are the causes for the few controlling the many.

These factors contribute to the immoral conduct in politics. It is for this reason that money can be used so successfully in politics, and that it is the most powerful weapon by which the popular will may be thwarted, stifled, or moulded, according to the purpose for which it was intended.

Politics in practice is not as moral as it might be. Every scheme, device, trick, deception, and mendacity are usually resorted to in political campaigns. Calumny finds ready application, for the principle has its foundation upon the theory that "unquestionably the calumniator will always find a great number of persons inclined to believe him, or to side with him; it therefore follows that whenever the object of such calumnies is once lowered in credit by these means, he will soon lose the reputation and power founded on that credit, and sink under the permanent and vindictive attacks of the calumniator."

There is no reason why the standards of conduct in politics should be lower than those which apply in the ordinary walks of life. The great moral reserve force which is so essential to the existence of a free government should be exercised by the people, for if they, as individuals, do not exercise a high standard of conduct popular government is impossible. The rules of conduct which

may be deduced from the Bill of Rights should form one of the standards of our political conduct—for it is not law, nor the forced imposition, by the creation of an intolerant popular opinion, upon the masses by a few or a class of *their* ideas as to proper conduct and the right way of living, irrespective of the opinion of others, that control the conduct of men; but it is the exercise of the moral reserve force, in that the citizen must respect the rights of his fellow citizen and the rights of the collective, and above all must not ask of others what he would not ask of himself.

CONFUCIANISM, BUDDHISM, AND CHRISTIANITY.[1]

BY BENOY KUMAR SARKAR.

Method of Approach.

WE propose to review briefly three great religions of mankind in their historical as well as psychological relations. Let us assume for our present consideration the fact that every religious system advances, in the first place, a set of hypotheses generally known as theological dogmas, in the second place, a body of practices and notions that in the absence of a better term may be called superstitions, and in the third place, a code of moral sanctions. As a rule, it is the higher intellectuals in a community that are interested in the doctrines of theology, while the man in the street is more attracted by the theatrical, scenic, or anecdotal aspects of God, the soul, and the other world. The morals, however, though they depend in the last analysis on the individual's status in the economic grades or classes of a people, may for ordinary purposes be taken to be the outcome of the people's general consensus of opinion and collective tradition. In a study of comparative religion we must take care to point out exactly which of these three phases of socio-religious life we have singled out for discussion, for it is clear that it would be unscientific to compare the popular superstitions and folk-beliefs of one faith with the metaphysical speculations in which high-browed Doctors of Divinity indulge, in another.

As it is always convenient to proceed from the known to the unknown, we shall begin with Christianity, or rather, use Christ-lore as the peg on which to hang Buddhism and Confucianism *cum*

[1] A lecture delivered at Amherst College.