

POLITICAL CORRUPTION

Is an Integral Part of the Present
Industrial System---Supported
by the Best Citizens.

With the moral standards produced by our economic system, it is no wonder that our periodic appeals to good citizens to organize to save their city or reform the nation have become grotesque and clownish. The good citizens we call upon to rise above their material self-interests—and that on the ground of more material self interest, lest the political corruption they have begotten sweep their material things away—are in fact the socially worst; it is from them the city and the nation needs saving. The social redemption will come, at last, through the people the good citizens exploit and fear. The good citizens are the chief enemies of goodness; the men of "blameless lives" are the high priests of wrongs that affront the skies, that blaspheme the universe and that makes the very stones cry out against the suffering of man.

Public or political morality, even more than what we call individual and social morality, is destroyed by the economic system. If any text for this proposition were needed, it was furnished, the other day, by Charles T. Root, representing the Merchants' Association of New York City, at a meeting of vast financial interests here in Chicago. His address, as reported by the Times-Herald of Oct. 6, 1898, began with this very candid and solemn thesis: "The commercial element in this country shall have its rightful due, and that due is nothing more nor less than a preponderating influence in national and state legislation." The political corruption of which we complain is simply the overflow of the business corruption by which "the commercial

element gains and maintains its preponderating influence." Political corruption is an integral part of the present business system. In New York City the bottom municipal ailment is not Tammany Hall and its retainers, but the business interests that use Tammany Hall to buy legislation at Albany, and to buy franchises at the city hall; Tammany is but a symptom, or a disease, of an economic system that is through and through corrupt and morally exhausted. It is "business" that balks our attempts at better city government; that easily bridles and saddles our feeble and halting municipal reforms and mounts them with good citizens who will ride them in the direction of property interests. It is "business" that elects and corrupts our State and national legislatures and debauches all our sacred political functions. There is scarcely any legislation in the land, municipal or state or national, that is not now bought and sold in the open market.

Worse than all else, the economic system corrupts the sources of public opinion and baffles the free expression of such opinion as remains. The money that owns the public press, that inspires its dispatches and writes its editorials, also dictates what shall be taught in our cottages and qualifies the utterances of the pulpit to an immeasurably larger degree than we are willing to admit; and it is gradually adopting legal, journalistic and religious means to suppress freedom of speech. If I were to stand before any representative religious gathering in the land, and there preach actual obedience to the sermon on the mount, declaring that we must actually do what Jesus said, I would commit a religious scandal; I would henceforth be held in disrepute by the official religion that bears Jesus' name. If the head of some great oil combination, though it had violated every law of God or man, besides the so-called economic laws which neither God nor man ever had anything to do with, and though it had debauched our nation infinitely beyond the moral shock of the civil war, were to stand before any repre-

sentative religious gathering with an endowment check in his hand he would be greeted with an applause so vociferous as to partake of the morally idiotic. And, mind you, the condemnation of the miserable spectacle rests not upon the monopolist, but upon ourselves; upon those of us who worship at his shrine, and teach and preach by the grace of his endowments.—Professor Herron of Iowa College, at Chicago, Nov. 7.