

**THE HINDRANCES  
TO GOOD  
CITIZENSHIP. [1910]**

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The Hindrances to Good Citizenship. [1910] by James Bryce

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**JAMES BRYCE**

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BY  
JAMES BRYCE

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# I

## INTRODUCTION

WHEN first I was honoured by the request to deliver this course of lectures, founded by one whom I knew and respected, and who was himself the model of a generous and public-spirited citizen, zealous in many good works, I hesitated to undertake a function which could, as it seemed to me, be better discharged by some American citizen who, because he was a citizen, knew from personal observation and experience what are the duties and responsibilities that belong to citizenship in this country. Such a lecturer would, I thought, have the facts more thoroughly before him than a stranger could, and could deal with them more freely than one who might feel that it would be unbecoming for him to criticise the standard of civic duty in a nation to which he did not belong.

Presently, however, it struck me that the fundamental problems of citizenship are the same in all free countries, that as all preceding lecturers had



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viewed them from an American point of view, there might be some advantage in having them presented from an European point of view also, that the experience we Europeans have gained might be profitable to you here, and finally that every man who has in one country enjoyed exceptional opportunities of studying the actualities of politics owes it to his friends in other countries to give them such conclusions as he has been able to form. Such opportunities have, as it happens, come in my way during many years spent in active political life in the British Parliament. Moreover, we English students owe a special duty to America, not only in respect of our fraternal attachment to your nation, but also because our political phenomena resemble yours more nearly than they do those of any other country, so that reflections drawn from Great Britain are likely to have some practical worth for you. Thus, I came eventually to the conclusion that the privilege of addressing you on the Duties of Citizenship was one I ought not to forego.

What I have to say to you will accordingly be mainly based on what I have seen in Europe, and especially in England. When my observations are

expressed in general terms, you will understand that they primarily refer to the phenomena of Europe, and when they are meant to refer to the United States, I shall say so expressly. I dwell on this point in order to avert possible misconceptions and to prevent you from supposing that I shall in any way approach that field of current politics which is to me, who represent here another country, a forbidden field. It will be only natural if some remarks I may have to make, though drawn from English experience, should be applicable here, because the differences between your institutions and ours are differences more often of form than of substance. The hindrances to good citizenship are at bottom and in principle the same in both countries, though the particular shape and aspect they take in one or the other may sometimes conceal their resemblance. Accordingly, when I have occasion to note and comment on some phenomenon which occurs both in Europe and here, you will not suppose that my remarks are necessarily suggested by, or directed to, what I have observed in the United States.

Everywhere in human society two principles have been and are at work, principles antagonistic to one another, yet equally essential to the well-

Principles  
underlying  
popular  
govern-  
ment.

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being of civil society. These are the principle of Obedience and the principle of Independence, the submission of the individual will to other wills and the assertion of that will against other wills. The former principle, carried to excess, gives Despotism. The latter, carried to excess, and generally diffused through a people, ends in Anarchy. The undue extension of the former has been so widespread as to have brought nearly all communities into a stage of despotic government and (till very recently) kept most of them there, whereas Anarchy has scarcely existed except in that detachment of individuals or families from one another which belongs to the very rudest states of society.

The reasonable mean between, or an adjustment to one another of, these two principles creates what we call Free or Popular government, in which a relatively large number of individual wills agree to form a collective will of the community, and to obey that will cheerfully because each individual has borne a part in forming it.

This scheme seems to offer not only the best security that the interests of all will be fully considered and the common interest best attained, but also the best prospect that each individual