

as fraught with mischief if carried out. What does he mean by "necessarily?" He must mean that when a right becomes very valuable, it will be seized upon by some other than the possessor, and to prevent this, it ought to be taken away. And this the gentleman puts forth as a maxim of his political morality.

Mr. CHAMBERS explained. What he said was, that where the practical exercise of an abstract right is accompanied by evils which counterbalance the benefits derived from the existence of the right, it ought to be abandoned. That was his morality, and he would stand or fall by it.

Mr. McLANE resumed. If the right of suffrage was an abstract right, what is a practical right? This is a practical right. If it be an abstract right, and the mischiefs resulting from its practical exercise counterbalance the benefits from its exercise, it is better that it be abandoned. That was the principle of the political morality of the gentleman from Kent. It was a principle unknown to any government, civil or divine. If this principle were carried out, the effect would be that all government must stand still. He then referred to the principle which was perceptible in the operations of a Divine Providence, which separated the innocent from the guilty, and to the principle of our own penal code, which lays it down as better, that ten guilty should escape than that one innocent person should be condemned. According to the argument of the gentleman from Kent, we ought to be deprived of an unquestionable right, because the exercise of that right may lead to great abuses. He could not see how this principle could apply to the elective franchise, which is, in itself, too valuable to be counterbalanced by any imaginable mischiefs. He referred to banking operations, which led to forgeries, where the forger is punished, while the innocent man is untouched. The liberty of the press was liable to great abuse, because it sometimes becomes licentious; yet we do not attempt to restrict that liberty. Formerly, indeed, restraints were imposed on the liberty of the press; and it was attempted to restrain it under a recent administration in England, and also in this country. But no one now would attempt to restrict the liberty of the press as a punishment. This liberty stands, in importance, side by side, by the elective franchise. Instead of restricting its free action, we are content with punishing those who abuse it. One great principle is, that no man shall be prevented from publishing what he pleases, but such as falsely publish are punished.

But, he went on to enquire, what are the causes of the corruption of the ballot-box in this State? Let us find out the cause, and apply the remedy to that. The cause is to be found in the unhealthy condition of public opinion. It is because public opinion winks at these corruptions that they have grown to their present enormity. Unless it is in response to public opinion, we can never make penal laws which will prove efficient to check the evil. Public opinion is not healthy on this point. His remedy was to cure public opinion, and then our penal laws will prove sufficient. This morbid state of public

opinion has been produced by the strife of parties, under our conflicting State administrations. He did not mean to assail one party more than another. He condemned both parties where their conduct merited condemnation. In their eagerness for political ascendancy, they have not always been careful enough to keep on the right side of the line which separates the legal from the illegal. The course of corruption is downward: it begins at the head, and descends to the feet. The example of the high, preserves or corrupts the law. And so it will ever be. We shall have a corrupt community in the mass when the heart or the head is corrupt. When men holding high stations become corrupt, we must expect the mass to be infected. When we see men of wealth and standing contributing their means to feed corruption, it is our duty to grapple with them, and shut up the source of the evil. Without the aid of money, there would be no corrupt voting.

The bitter fruit which is produced by the strife of parties is a corruption which increases until it destroys the institutions in which it is found. Such was its fatal influence on the ancient republics. Following their course of corruption their fate will be ours.

He referred to the system of gerrymandering which had on several occasions exhibited itself in the arrangement of the election districts. This vice originated not in our State; it had its origin elsewhere. But the application of it in this State has been productive of the colonization of voters, which has been so much complained of. The evil of this principle is the result of the struggle of the people to extricate themselves from the condition in which its oppressive operation has placed them. He only stated the fact; he did not justify it. It would have been better to wait patiently until it had worked its own overthrow. But if you press on any portion of the community, it will rise against the pressure. You find a people in the tranquil enjoyment of a freedom of more than half a century, and by a single law you destroy it. Were it not that thus public opinion could rectify the evil which oppresses it, a more dreadful strife would be engendered by the weak against the strong.

There is one other result, a reference to which caused him great pain. Large contributions have been made by wealthy individuals, for the purpose of carrying on elections. He had known committees formed in the City of Baltimore, for the express purpose of collecting funds, opening books, and calling on office-holders and others for contributions of ten and twenty dollars each, for the purpose of defraying the expenses of an election. A candidate for Governor has been assessed as high as \$3000 or \$4000, and has been told it was for the purpose of defraying the expenses of the election. Such is the condition of things, that the most respectable men have been required to give their means. And how many are there in this Hall, who can say they are free from this imputation?

Mr. CHAMBERS. I am free.

Mr. McLANE resumed, stating that money thus