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The Threat to Manhood

THE voters are showing that they really like to vote for a man when one appears who comes up to their conception of mankind—when they get a chance to vote for him.

If a man is to get anywhere in politics, if he is to secure a chance to let his fellow-countrymen pass upon his fitness for public service, he must first get a certificate viséd by the professional politicians who have no interest but their own, which they have found they can best further by dividing themselves into two opposing machines. True, once in a while a man compels the politicians to visé a certificate that isn't "regular"; but these exceptions are few. And some instances that seem to be exceptions are, on examination, found to be instances of shrewd hypocrisy—the grossly practical politician successfully disguising himself through a long career as a man of real independence.

How shall the man, whether seeking humble office or high, get through the machine without leaving his manliness shredded and entangled in the wheels?

A Bad Taste in the Mouth

MR. CHARLES FROHMAN lately announced that in future he will produce no plays that satirize Americans—or, as he expresses it, hold them up to ridicule. Mr. George Ade, already one of our leading playwrights, announces it as his mission to make his countrymen think well of themselves.

On business grounds the purpose of both is to be commended. Nothing is commoner than the man who says that he reads or goes to a play to be amused, and who objects to works of art that, as he expresses it, leave a bad taste in his mouth. Lately, two very able plays by Mr. Clyde Fitch have failed, the one largely because it satirized the foibles of women shopping, and the other largely because it showed the seamy side of marriages in which wholesome American girls sell themselves for foreign titles. The public of the voracious and satirical Mr. Howells and Mr. James numbers thousands, while novels that deal with commercial drummers who make themselves kings sell by hundreds of thousands.

But is the purpose proclaimed by the manager and the playwright as patriotic as it sounds? There is much, of course, in educating a national self-respect; but is there nothing in the gift which Burns wished the gods would "give us"? Isn't it rather that most of us lack the intellectual faculty of enjoying veracity in art? Time was, and not so very long ago, when honest folk loudly proclaimed that there was more beauty in Home, Sweet Home than in all Beethoven and Wagner. An optimist might hope that those who now abhor the bad taste in the mouth will some day be just a little ashamed of proclaiming their preference for crude art—even if they still prefer it, which they probably will.

The criterion of a play or a novel is not whether it makes us think well of ourselves, but whether it makes us think truly and deeply. No one enjoys the bad taste in his mouth, or if

he does his taste is quite perverted. But all who have real minds enjoy thinking real thoughts. "There ought never to be more pain," said Coleridge, speaking on a very similar subject, "than is compatible with a coexisting pleasure, and to be amply repaid by thought." A false satire or a brutal tragedy is the worst of art; but true satire and intellectual or spiritual tragedy is a mental tonic to all who have minds.

A Step Toward World-Wide Peace

A PATRIOTIC overseer of Harvard College has caused to be introduced in Congress a bill "For the Promotion of Education" which makes invalid the copyright of any book that does not spell according to Noah Webster. Travelers with two "i"s had better stay at home, and even the most scientific inquiry is valueless if spelled with an "e."

American spelling, be it granted, is better than English; but the question is only of the worse of two evils. Both are sufficiently false, philologically and practically. The late Professor F. J. Child, who did more to promote education than any, or perhaps all, of his overseers, used to wax humorous and testy on this point. Like all profound students of language, he recognized that our spelling, at best, is a false guide to derivation, and would have preferred to spell phonetically. "An Englishman once told me," he used to say to his classes, "that a man of honor was all very well for a greengrocer, but that he would never admit to his intimacy any but men of honour." Then Professor Child would add slyly: "I used to ask him whether he refused to acknowledge his Creator." Philologically, of course, we ought to spell it "Creatour," as Chaucer did.

The unnecessary letters in English are about ten per cent.—all deadheads in the communication of ideas. To drop them would be to save ten per cent. of our time in writing, ten per cent. of the cost of composition, ten per cent. of the cost of printing and of binding—in short, ten per cent. of all the labor and cost of writing and publication, a matter of untold millions.

More important than this, perhaps, is the fact that a standard of phonetics in spelling would vastly reduce the number of illiterates, for the one great bar to learning to write is the hopeless vagaries of orthography. The writing which, according to Shakespeare, "comes by nature" comes wisely, perhaps, but not too well.

And it is more than a question of illiteracy. The first step toward a world-wide era of peace and good will is mutual understanding among the nations; and if any language is fitted to become universal by its innate superiority and the might of those who speak it, it is English. Why can we not, like the Germans, the Italians, the Spanish and, to a great extent, the French, agree to write both wisely and well?

Sharper Than the Sharpers

BEFORE the postal cases came to trial in the District of Columbia it was cynically said that no jury would convict because in Washington anybody who could swindle the Government was regarded as deserving of his booty. So not only in Washington, but in other cities where indictments were found, the accused wore jauntily the semblance of confidence and believed to the last that they would escape. Behind prison bars or under heavy bail waiting for new trials they are trying to adjust themselves to their mistakes.

American probity of the average sort has long compromised its principles on return voyages from lands where wares are a bit cheaper than at home. Smuggling has been very much in vogue, even in the best circles. Many boasted of their success, and thus the habit grew. Within the past year the more venturesome found that declarations regarding dutiable goods meant something more than a formality. They saw their jewels and other treasures rudely taken from them. Then they proceeded to bring political influence to bear in the usual way, only to discover that the old measures of last resort did not prevail. And they had to pay the full price for their experience.

Stealing a hot stove has been frequently cited as the superlative of misdirected skill, and yet it would seem to be a petty and foolish operation compared with the irregular annexation of Government land. There is a fixity about land that would discourage the ordinary thief, especially if it belonged to Uncle Sam. But land robbery has been a favorite, and at times a profitable, enterprise, and with the thief what has been may still be; so the attempt was made to secure titles to hundreds of thousands of acres of the public lands—to more, in fact, than the square miles of some European states. No ordinary persons tried this, remember, but, to use the words of the Secretary of the Interior, "mostly men who have occupied positions of influence and high standing, both socially and politically, and many of them men of large wealth." Their difficulty was in certain changes of sentiment and administration that have come into American affairs, and even if the courts should let them off finally they will go empty-handed and bankrupt in character.

We are to have no more wholesale pillage such as that which used to make the Rivers and Harbors Bill an epitome of spoliation. And there is a new kind of watchfulness awake

in the land that declines to discriminate in favor of large stealings and masterly criminals.

For several decades Uncle Sam has been close upon the heels of the little rogues—those who rifled mails or counterfeited coins and their like—and he has caught most of them. Now he goes just as confidently at higher game, and the gratification is that neither wealth nor political influence can pull him into compromise. He is sharper than the sharpers, and he is furnishing concrete proofs of the fatuity of the old idea that robbing the Government is a privilege of either a citizen or a constituency.

This demonstration comes at the right time. So much is being said about the crimes of money—of high finance and high society—that object-lessons carry greater force than any amount of preaching or any number of resolutions. If this be the Roosevelt idea of "a square deal," by all means let us have more of it!

Negotiable Gifts

A YOUNG woman had an admirer who tried her patience each holiday by sending her an appalling exhibit of his lack of good taste and of his ignorance of her likes and needs. At last she wrote to him—a few days before the last holiday—saying: "If you are going to send me a present this time, even if it's only a dollar's worth, please send it in cash."

There is "back to nature." There is "the simple life." Many are the conventionalities that would make us laugh if we were not so used to them; of these is not one of the most senseless and silly the convention against money presents? As a rule—not always, but as a rule—would not weddings and other gift-accompanied festivals be gayer, vastly gayer, if the beneficiaries, instead of being showered with what other people think they ought to wish and need, were presented with cash and cashable checks, each present with the message: "Think of me when you are using this to help you to what you'd really like to have?"

There would be exceptions to this rule. But would they be so many as the exceptions to the present rule?

Where the Guilt Lies

THERE are few, indeed, of even the worst monopolists and exactors of extortionate prices who are not in all their private and personal relations exemplary in honesty, generosity, kindness, consideration. Even the manufacturers of adulterated food, even the owners of the filthiest kinds of tenement-houses, are good fathers, warm friends, eager to help on their acquaintances. Practically all the perpetrators of crimes against men in the mass deny to themselves their own guilt, protest to themselves that they are merely obeying, where they cannot mitigate, the cruel but inevitable laws of nature.

What, then, is the cause of the trouble? Why do the most savage cruelties, the most cowardly oppressions of the poor and the helpless, persist in an age when the least humane of men are in so many vital respects more sensitive than were the most humane men only a few decades ago?

The answer is the decay of individual responsibility. And would not at least one of the remedies seem to be a system of law whereunder a crime or oppression charged now to "the corporation" should be brought directly home to the principal owner of that corporation, with the sin and the shame visible to all men upon his front door, with the right of redress clear and certain against him himself?

The Logical Candidate

MANY of the conspicuous speakers on both sides of the last Presidential campaign asserted, some with approval, others with disapproval, that we as a people have become infected with the military spirit and are dreaming dreams of "seeking the bubble reputation in the cannon's mouth." And undeniably there is a good deal of big-fist and big-stick talk in very hard times. And if you passed most of your life, as politicians do, among men gathered about glasses of strong drink, you would probably think that the American people were just itching to go forth immediately and lick all creation.

But talk is cheap, and barroom talk is—cheaper. The real sentiments, the real intuitions of people must be sought elsewhere than in their loose expressions in hours of relaxation. And if you look in the right places, you find that the real ambitions and aspirations of us Americans are much the same as those of the masses of plain men elsewhere in the world—steady employment that makes one each year better off than he was the year before; a home and children; the respect of his acquaintances; the sense of steady growth in intelligence through reading and thinking; an orderly, honest and gentlemanly conduct of public affairs.

The politician who can convince the people that he really stands for these peaceful and generous and noble ideas, and that he will really work sanely and efficiently for the promotion of those ideals, will smash party lines to smithereens whenever he runs for any office, whether it be town-constable or President.