

"IF YOU HAVE STOLEN A SHEEP IT WILL AVAIL YOU NOTHING TO GIVE THE FEET TO GOD"

Frank P. Blair of Chicago has written for the Chicago Record-Herald an interesting article wherein he views the Rockefellers from what he calls "the standpoint of absolute ethics." Mr. Blair says:

The position occupied by Mr. Rockefeller and those of his ilk has not been discussed, so far as I have seen, from the standpoint of absolute ethics. Judged, from that standpoint, is the verdict now pronounced against them and their business methods by the jury of the people a just verdict? Will it be sustained or set aside by posterity?

I venture the opinion that the verdict is just, fully warranted by the uncontradicted evidence before the public, and that as civilization advances such methods will be execrated so long as the memory of them shall survive. From the standpoint of absolute ethics right thinking men of all creeds, of all religions and of no religion, must equally reprobate such practices as immoral, whether illegal or not.

The primary law of all life, brute and human, is that each adult individual shall receive reward in proportion to merit and shall suffer pains for all shortcomings. The swiftest wins the race, the strongest gets the food, the "fittest survive." In no other way can a species improve. Were it otherwise—did the weaker succeed, the slothful prosper—then, by the inexorable law of heredity, the species would deteriorate. But nature is "red in tooth and claw," the swiftest and the strongest prevail, their progeny supplants the unfit, and the species improves.

When, however, animals become gregarious, this law receives a qualification—namely, that each individual, in pursuit of food and shelter, must not so act as seriously to impede others of the aggregate in their like pursuit; otherwise, of necessity, the herd would disintegrate, and the benefits of their association be lost. The inherited instinct of gregarious animals enforces this second rule, as e. g., when the "rogue" elephant is driven from the herd; when an offending crow is killed by its mates.

DUTY TO FELLOW MEN

This second law of life becomes more and more obligatory as civilization advances, and now with us is a part of the law of the land, embodied in the maxim: "So use your own as not to injure another." Of course in all highly warlike societies the individual is sacrificed to the safety or to the predatory policy of the state; as in ancient Sparta, where his person was taken in custody by the government; as in France, where army service is compulsory; as in Dahomey, where all property is owned by the king. But as societies cease to be militant and pass into the industrial stage, more and more are the rights of person, of property and of locomotion safeguarded, and more and more is each required not to infringe those rights in others.

But a society organized strictly and solely in accordance with these two laws would still fall far short of that ideal state toward which the race is now manifestly progressing. Multitudinous services are even now rendered gratuitously, the sick and infirm are cared for, and social intercourse rendered agreeable by numerous attentions given with no expectation of reward. The sentiment of sympathy, which has its root in parental action and which finds its larger expression in benevolence, is a growing sentiment, and no life wherein it lacks free scope and play can be considered complete. Thus the totality of happiness is increased and the tide of life raised. This altruistic sentiment is slowly developing in human nature, and in the future will cause more and greater satisfactions than any purely selfish gratification can evoke. Then, indeed, will be realized the precept of Christ that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

All students of the philosophy of Herbert Spencer will at once perceive the source of the foregoing generalizations.

METHODS OF THE "SYSTEM"

With this introduction come we now to the facts known or admitted in the cases of many of our "captains of industry." These may be grouped under two heads.

1. "Unfair Competition." Mr. Rockefeller can not deny, and it would not avail him to deny that he has secretly received railroad rebates and that these rebates constituted a large factor in the accumulation of his wealth.

Tested by the second law of life, this practice

is immoral. If A, by a secret contract with a transportation agency secures an advantage in freight rates over B in the same line of business, whereby B's profits are diminished or his trade ruined, then A manifestly hinders and impedes B in the exercise of his (B's) equal rights. Moreover, A violates the first law in that he receives something to which his merit or his labor has not entitled him.

2. "Oppressive Competition." I do not understand it to be denied that many of these "captains" in order to suppress competition, have resorted to the device of selling for a time certain commodities at prices below the cost of production until the obnoxious rival is ruined or driven out of business.

Here the violation of the second law is plain. There is, too, an added offense against society at large, for, where competition is killed, the price of the commodity is advanced beyond legitimate bounds, thus impeding also the liberty of the many.

Other infractions of the laws of life have been committed by the Standard Oil Company, by the "beef trust" and by other so-called trusts; but the foregoing are amply sufficient for the argument, and there exists the advantage as to them that they can neither be palliated nor denied.

Premitting the Divine command, murder is condemned by civilized nations for two other reasons: First, because its tendency is destructive to society, and, second, because of the suffering it entails on the family of the murdered one. In the pursuit of wealth these "captains" have ruined their thousands and their tens of thousands. If the heinousness of murder were measured by the injury done to society at large and the suffering caused to individuals, how much worse than murderers are these men who ruthlessly use their vast powers to crush their competitors.

BUSINESS IS NOT WAR

But it is said "business is war," and such methods are proper to warfare. With right thinking men, with moral men, business is not war, and there comes a time when competition is immoral. When by superior ability, industry and foresight, A is enabled to market his wares cheaper than B, the code of absolute ethics requires A to restrain his activities when his own wants and the wants of those dependent upon him are abundantly satisfied. To drive B into bankruptcy simply to pile up dollars is immoral, and from the ethical standpoint as reprehensible as to rob B at the muzzle of a pistol. The more is it to be classed with robbery when such ruin is accomplished by unfair or oppressive means. Cut-throat competition, where the weaker is driven to the wall, is a survival of the savage lust for conquest inherited from countless generations of predatory ancestors. In a really civilized society it will be regarded with the same horror and condemnation with which we now regard the common crimes against person and property.

Here comes in the rule that in addition to justice ethics enjoin beneficence. No society can be deemed approximately perfect until that injunction is habitually obeyed, and in the ideal state the pleasure A will derive from abstaining from ruining B in the case supposed will far transcend any purely selfish gratification which A could possibly achieve.

When the Almighty created life He impressed these laws upon it, and thus, while they may be called "laws of nature," they are also decrees of God. Obedience to them is the fundamental principle of religion, practically viewed. If this is not taught in the church where attends the particular captain, then that church fails to reveal all the divine commands.

Not only is it immoral to traverse these laws, but in the long run it is fatal. Any society which habitually tolerates such infractions will perish, to be supplanted by a fitter society. Such is the inexorable law.

REMEDY LIES WITH PEOPLE

What is the remedy? To a small extent, human law. When legal redress shall be made quick, cheap and efficient, so that discriminations and secret advantages in business may be promptly discovered and prevented or punished, something will have been accomplished. But laws unless backed by public sentiment are worse than useless. The full, adequate and complete remedy

is universal public reprobation. When men shall come to regard these practices in their true moral light; when society shall openly set its seal of condemnation upon the perpetrators; when, in the language of the 102d article of war, "it shall be deemed scandalous to associate" with such "captains," then and not till then will the practice cease.

With the ethical aspect of the "tainted money" question I am not concerned; but there occurs to my mind an old Spanish proverb which should give some of these "captains" pause. Roughly translated it runs: "If you have stolen a sheep, it will avail you nothing to give the feet to God."

CHEAPER INSURANCE

Paul Morton, president of the Equitable Life Assurance Society, being asked if he thought that one result of insurance exposures would be the placing of insurance upon a cheaper basis, said: "I hardly think so. The people do not want cheaper insurance, but they do want safe insurance. My observation has been that cheap insurance is never safe insurance. Insurance has become an acknowledged investment, one in which a man does not have to wait for death before anybody can obtain any good from it. Being a legitimate and good investment, and being recognized as such, the public has a right to demand that it be safe."

The revelations before the insurance committee have shown that these old line insurance companies could make a marked reduction in the cost of insurance, and at the same time make the investment entirely secure, if business prudence and common honesty characterized the administration of the company's affairs.

Mr. Morton is laboring under a wrong impression if he imagines that the people do not want cheaper insurance. They not only want it, but marked reduction in the cost of insurance is bound to follow if practical and permanent good is to result from recent disclosures.

WHAT ABOUT THE EQUITABLE?

How does it happen that the public has not been told the amount of the contributions for republican campaign funds made by the Equitable Life Assurance Society? Surely that society, under the patriotic administration of the Hydes and Alexanders, was sufficiently alive to the public welfare in 1896 and in 1900 to contribute liberally to the republican campaign funds in order that the American people might be saved from themselves?

Can it be possible that the investigation promised by Paul Morton has not been thorough? Or can it be possible that Mr. Morton has no intention of informing his policyholders as to the society's contributions to the campaign funds of Mr. Morton's beloved party?

EXPERTS

The St. Louis Globe-Democrat says: "It would be well for the republicans this time to let the senate take the initiative in passing a rate-regulation measure. The senate's interstate commerce committee has given a good deal of time this year to the study of the questions which are involved in that general policy."

Why not transfer the authority to the railroad managers? They have "given a good deal of time this year to the study of the questions which are involved in that general policy." That would be almost as effective a method of "letting well enough alone" as an assignment of the duty to a body absolutely under the domination of corporations.

A GOOD STORY

Colonel Sidney C. Tapp of Atlanta, Ga., is the author of a book entitled "The Struggle." This is a novel dealing with the trust question. The author draws a striking picture of the operations of Wall street, and those who have had the privilege of reading the advance sheets say that Colonel Tapp has written a captivating story and one which can not fail to leave its impression upon the people who are suffering from the evils which he so faithfully exposes and so vigorously assails.