THE STRENGTH OF THE TRUSTS LIES IN THE WEAKNESS OF THE PEOPLE

"The financial buccaneers who have been 'holding up' the country in the necessities of life, keeping out foreign competition through the tariff at one end and crushing home competition at the other until the increase in the cost of living is alarming, have remained immune until every lawyer who has had to deal with this big question knows that the pretended enforcement of the law is a huge farce. . . . We all know that the Anti-Trust Law is being openly flouted and violated every day by some of the most powerful men in the land. There are numberless secret, unlawful pools to control prices and restrict production operating today, many of them under written agreements that are criminal conspiracies on their face. . . .

"We are told by a certain section of the press that there has been a reaction in the public mind against what they are pleased to call 'attacks' on these criminal conspiracies.

"For the sake of the country let us hope these gentlemen are mistaken; for if they are right we shall have an upheaval in this country as compared to which the mild and harmless experiments of the last Administration will seem like a midsummer zephyr alongside a cyclone."

These words, which are quoted from an interview with Mr. Samuel Untermyer when embarking for a vacation in Europe, deserve more than the passing attention such informal utterances usually command. Mr. Untermyer is one of America's most famous lawyers and speaks from something more than hearsay on these matters. Recent revelations as to its past tactics have fixed the American Sugar Refining Company in the public mind as an extreme example of the "bad trust." Yet Mr. Untermyer is amused at our suddenly aroused virtuous anger against this particular trust which "is no worse than many others in its criminal methods, and not quite so bad as some." But more significant even than the state of affairs which he depicts is his prophecy of what would follow on the heels of a reactionary public attitude toward these abuses. "I dread the awakening," he went on to say, because "we are an hysterical, press-ridden people, and we go to extremes." If we are weakly tolerant today we will be weakly intolerant tomorrow.

We are so fickle, so busy and so easily led, he asserts, that reform movements directed against so shrewdly entrenched an evil as corporate dishonesty fail through lack of sustained public support. And without such support they must continue to fail. For the power of the men behind the big corporations is so great, says Mr. Untermyer, that they are practically above the law except when confronted with an aroused public opinion. If their attitude is one of amused cynicism toward the fierce but transient outbursts of excitement with which we greet each new letting in of light on the methods of the "predatory corporations" it is not to be wondered at. "We are getting," says
Mr. Untermeyer, "just about the sort of administration of our laws that we deserve."

Observers of our political history must admit that there is justice in these criticisms, which witness to a very clear insight into a certain phase of our national temperament. In our efforts toward reform we undoubtedly find it easier to be vehement and intemperate than persevering and just. When the muckrakers scare up a new quarry we join the hue and cry with fine zeal, and the voice of our condemnation echoes in the press, the pulpit and the legislative halls. But unless we can make a quick kill we soon tire of the chase and drop back somewhat shamefacedly to our routine interests. Perfectly aware of this characteristic, the over-powerful corporations and other "malefactors of great wealth" do not fail to take advantage of it. When detected in some act against the public welfare they find their best defense in evasion and delay, in appeals and demurrers, until the people weary of the whole matter and look about for brisker sport.

When Mr. Roosevelt began his vigorous and spectacular onslaught upon corporate wrong-doing public opinion rallied instantly to his support. But by the end of his Administration the press reflected a slight but unmistakable change of attitude toward his crusade. The public was out of breath. It had failed to put the money barons behind prison bars or to collect a $29,000,000 fine from the Standard Oil Company, and it began to feel bored with it all, and to look around for a new sensation. It was inclined to take refuge in the lazy man's logic that since it had failed to catch a thief there probably wasn't any thief. If Mr. Roosevelt had served for another term we may doubt if even his persuasive and dynamic personality could have kept public sentiment keyed to the fighting pitch.

Sometimes, it is true, such reaction has been the logical sequel of ill-advised and misdirected zeal. Thus when popular suspicion was focused upon the railroads and many abuses were discovered in that field some of the State legislatures rushed into hasty and drastic regulative legislation without either adequately investigating the facts or fully taking into consideration the local conditions. The subsequent nullification by the courts of many of the resultant laws tended to superimpose a cynical indifference upon the first fine enthusiasm for better things.

It was only the other day that Supreme Court Justice Hendrick told a graduating class in law of the coming struggle between dishonest corporations and the people, a struggle which involves, he said, "more potent danger to the Government than did the Rebellion." The fact that we are just now in a lull of the storm is a reason for more rather than less anxiety. For as Mr. Chesterton has well said, to leave things alone is not to leave them as they are, and eternal vigilance is the price at which we hold even the liberty we already have. To quote his own striking words:

"If you leave a thing alone you leave it to a torrent of change. If you leave a white post alone it will soon be a black post. If you particularly want it to be white you must be always painting it again; that is, you must be always having a revolution. Briefly, if you want the old white post you must have a new white post. But this which is true even of inanimate things is in a quite special and terrible sense true of all human things."

It all comes back to this question of the price of reform. If we hope to break up the corrupting alliances between business and politics, especially between business monopoly and political monopoly, we must first acknowledge our own share of responsibility for the conditions which make such alliances possible. We must recognize the fact that these abuses afford an index no less to the moral quality of the community as a whole than to that of the men who profit by them. The shadow of one common shame rests upon us all, and if absolute justice could apportion the punishment a share would fall to every one of us. For the chief menace to the
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commonweal resides not so much in the actual violation of the law as in the confused state of public opinion which both hurries and hampers the Government and the courts in their efforts to punish these violations. Moreover, as President Woodrow Wilson of Princeton pointed out in his baccalaureate sermon, certain men who have kept inside the law have done as much to debauch the nation as others who have overstepped the technical boundary between honest and dishonest greed. Of these disastrous accumulators of wealth within the pale of the law Mr. Wilson says:

"The men who brought disaster upon business by success brought it because they saw only the immediate task under their hands, volunteered no look around, paid no call of thought or wish upon their fellow men, left statesmanship to politicians and public interests to the censors of public morals; attended wholly to their own business. The business of life is a bigger thing than they thought it."

Wherever the evil to be remedied is found—whether in the field of labor, of capitalism, or of government—reform, to be effective, must be clean of pharisaism and personal vindictiveness. It must be based upon a wide and deep human sympathy, and an understanding of the more ideal possibilities of men.

The situation demands of the public both patience and perseverance. If the crimes of a dishonest trust are only the vastly magnified crimes of a dishonest corner grocery, the fact is no excuse for cynicism. The dishonesty remains to be corrected in both cases. If we are compelled to admit that in the matter of personal integrity and moral principles the men who made and control some of the most bitterly decried trusts would measure high by the very standards of the people who attack them there is still no reason to be bewildered or discouraged. It is possible, however, that our own standards would be none the worse for a little sharpening of outline and testing of angles. If we have now in the Senate's disposal of the tariff question, in the evasion of the law's machinery by guilty corporations, and in the sinister presence of special privilege in our legislative lobbies, the kind of treatment we deserve, it still remains to us to deserve something better.

As a people we are constantly absorbed in our individual and private affairs, and only spasmodically concerned about the larger public problems which equally, if less directly, affect us. Our lack of vigilance creates the opportunity which the alert and ever vigilant corporation naturally seizes. We cry out in indignation when we discover that the forces of special privilege and organized wealth have gained some fresh advantage at the expense of the general public, but we continue to make new opportunities for the same thing to be repeated. The most dangerous point of contact between our interests and the interests of such trusts as have earned the title of predatory, is to be found, of course, in the men we select to represent us in our legislatures. If these men knew that their official actions would be intelligently scrutinized and that they would be called to account by their constituents for any dereliction we would have fewer legislative scandals. If our representatives sometimes put self-interest before the public good and betray us into the hands of the exploiter, a large share of the responsibility must come back to the people who chose them. And if the corporations gain an undue advantage in the game, it is because a certain mental and moral slackness on the part of the public has given them their opportunity. Interests unprotected, like property unguarded, are invitations to steal.

The stray corporations, on the other hand, captured by vigilant, hardworking men, leave no outpost unguarded, and let no opportunity of gaining an advantage escape them. In so far as they seize and hold these advantages by virtue of strength and vigilance the public has its chief lesson to learn of them. The power to control and direct labor predicates a higher form of efficiency than the mere
power to labor, and these men grow in strength through the exercise of this higher efficiency. If they trade constantly upon the weakness of the people, the fact is less deplorable than that the weakness should exist to be traded upon. For the weakness of the people is unnecessary and inexcusable, being merely a weakness of attitude. If the people displayed a fraction of the vigilance and constancy of purpose which is exercised by the corporations present corporate abuses would be impossible. The very idea of them, in fact, would be as absurd as the suggestion of a small boy holding up and robbing an army.

**REVIEWS**

"Surely I should have seen that flower face, Say, in an English lane when Spring was new And high, white clouds were drifting in the blue, And a glad lark made music in the place; Where all about you was no thing more base Than the pink hawthorn heavy with its dew, And where my man’s eye at the sight of you Should drop, unworthy of such maiden grace. Oh, child, it should be thus, and yet tonight Here in the city’s red iniquities Strange I should find you in this garish light With this hard mocking in your tired eyes And curled, red lips set jesting at the sight Of a man’s wrath at Life’s mad comedies."

("The Joy o’ Life." By Theodosia Garrison. 148 pages. Price $1.00 net. Published by Mitchell Kennerly, New York.)

"The Joy o’ Life” is the first collection that has been made of the many poems written by Theodosia Garrison. Few names are better known to the magazine reader than Mrs. Garrison’s. She has been a remarkably prolific writer and apparently has always kept a uniform standard of excellence. As a matter of fact, one receives this impression because she has steadily improved from the time when she first began writing. Her constantly deepening insight into life and emotion, increasing clarity of expression and mastery of technique, has won from those who have followed her work, the sincerest admiration. From being a writer of magazine sentiments, in verse of ordinary quality, she has become a singer of the real songs of life. One needs no better proof of the depth of her vision and the vitality with which she handles her subjects than the fact that the book, which contains something over one hundred of her poems, entirely lacks that monotony which so often marks a collection of one poet’s work. In the more classic forms of verse she has shown that universal charity without which, no matter how well chosen and adroitly placed, the words of a poet are but tinkling cymbals. We quote a sonnet which seems to us to express very poetically an experience too pathetically frequent in city life:

**THE Lady in the White Veil,” by Rose O’Neill, proves to be one of those nebulous products of the imagination that impress one with their lightness and evanescence during the reading, yet linger long in the memory—one can hardly tell why. Her characters have that fairylike unreality, or perhaps it would be better to say human ideality, that transports the reader into a sort of golden world. Seventy-third street, no matter how well one may know it, takes on an atmosphere of romance and prismatic colors play about the edges of the houses. The plot of the story is admirably managed and, although the suspense is continued really beyond the logical point of its belief, the interest of the reader is closely held. It is refreshing also to get so pure and romantic a love story, and we feel that Mr. Robert Chambers must look to his laurels when Mrs. O’Neill begins to put into words what she portrays so surpassingly well in her illus-