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The Public Service

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OUR GUARANTEE

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THE incarnated spirit of public service is found in the person of that fine old Briton who said: "I look after my business for the sake of my wife and children, but I hold that a man's duty to society requires that he should have a care for those who are not of his own household." This humble man's life is one of the most precious and splendid portions of un-advertised Anglo-Saxon biography. Its whole tenor speaks to the fact that the humblest cobbler citizen can be and very often is among the greatest of public servants. It shows that the best kind of public service is done in secret and without sight of man. It does not advertise itself. It adopts a larger creed and a loftier code, which to be subject to and obey is to consider every human life and every human action in the light of an eternal obligation to the race.

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But the popular idea of the "public servant" is not the humble soul who quietly fishes for employment in his own small pool of acquaintance. The "real public man" is the more noisy person who is sent to Westminster or Ottawa, or who is hoisted into the city council. To these men there is delegated a fearful responsibility. Within one brief term of office they may add a crown of glory to a clean record of public service or they may create conditions that will wreck the finest social structure ever set up by God-inspired mortals. What really qualifies one for public service on the larger scale and makes him a "safe man for democracy?" Above all, who are the men and women to whom the rank and file may confidently look for leadership in the public service in these fateful times?

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Of a surety there is heavy weather ahead and a vast uncharted sea that will tax the character and genius of the best heart and brain in Canada. To the big questions that are even now exercising every responsible person and household of the community must be given big answers. Man's united ingenuity has to rise to supreme heights to solve the riddles of the modern world. The men who will solve them cannot be small men. The small man, rich in artifice, can never handle big and elemental things. But the "small man" is not necessarily the obscure man. More often than not the really big man is found on the cobbler's bench or setting types for a bare living, while the really small man is the puny so-called "captain of industry," stogy, pompous and imperious, soused in ugliness and humbug.

While our past for the greater part of its public life is a sorry medley of good intentions gone to seed, of rough-shod rascality with a fair leavening of noble service, the future is still a white sheet that may as easily retain its virgin purity as it may be smudged by inexcusable wrong-doing. It has no terrors for the constitutionally good man. There's mighty comfort in Mr. Wilson's recent saying that "the forces of the world do no threaten —they operate." In all debatable points in human relations, the solution of the seemingly complicated is exactly the same as the settlement of the obviously simple. It is entirely a matter of sincerity and temper. The great men of the race to-day are those who are chiefly capable of a great sincerity, and every schoolboy knows that the fixing up of any quarrel depends upon the frame of mind in which both parties approach the pow-wow.

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A keen observer gives it as his firm conviction that the main cause of all the unrest in the world to-day is the state of idleness prevailing in that class of persons who have no need to labor. The old school copy books kept reminding us that "An idle brain is the devil's workshop," and no man or woman would think it necessary to ask the copy book to prove its case. Their whole experience tells them that in any fit of the "blues" or spell of discontent, no exorcism charms like hard work. When both brain and brawn are marking time it is then the human machine gets its real experience of that mood of the soul we call "Hell." To so many, life is pleasure; to still more it is suffering, and there you have the reason for the "strike vote."

* * *

Public service, perilous, arduous, delicate, is required right now from every soul who is capable of service, but let there be no mistake as to what will be acceptable in "public service." The past is strewn with the wreckage of the unacceptables. Where money or self-interest is concerned, the public servant must first of all be found clean, and last of all, be found clean under the X-ray test of that clear white light called conscience. Whether rich or poor, busy or with "time to burn," the hour is great with opportunity for the man or woman who would realise that the greatest satisfaction on earth is hopeful, useful interest and service if it is only in behalf of the man on the next stool at the lunch counter. Be a door-keeper in the humblest village Bethel rather than a prince in the "tents of wickedness."

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