

Idle Thoughts on Lying

(Jerome K. Jerome, in "Common Sense")

LIE was once described by an observant schoolboy as an abomination in the face of the Lord, but a very pleasant help in time of trouble. I take it that most of us occasionally tell a lie. I am not prepared to make oath that I myself have never told a lie. It may have been. One seeks to forget these lapses. The temptation is strong. The trouble is pressing. The way out so easy. One trusts the Lord will not be fussy. Next time we will make it up to him by telling the truth. That even our beloved and trusted statesmen, bursting with pious platitudes, reeking of noble sentiments, should—the circumstances seeming to demand it—occasionally lie to us need not unduly shock us. But that premeditated, intentional, and deliberate lying has come to be regarded throughout the civilized world as an obvious and unobjectionable instrument of statesmanship; that it should be defended and upheld as a proper "part of the game," affords unpleasant reflection. A Mr. Bullitt, "a young American," accuses English statesmen of deceiving the public, and seems to have proved his case. The Daily News, standing for the Non-conformist conscience, welcomes the truth, but regrets that Mr. Bullitt should have been so "dishonorable" as to blurt it out. The game (this "game" that is played with lives and happiness of hundreds of millions of helpless men, women, and children) demands that lying shall be recognized as a legitimate means of making tricks. Young, inexperienced gentlemen who sit down to the table with elderly card-sharper must conform to the shady "etiquette" of the Diplomatic Saloon. The Truth (the Truth that might save the world from a decade of agony) was marked "Private and Confidential," not intended for publication to the common people. The Old World raises up its hands in horror: What is to become of it if the young players refuse to accept its code?

The Westminster Gazette is still more shocked. Says the Westminster Gazette: "There were two things that Mr. Bullitt did not understand. First, that according to the rules of the game" ("of Public Service," the Westminster Gazette prefers to call it) "an unofficial emissary is liable to be disavowed if his plans miscarry. Secondly, that a man engaged upon a public mission is not permitted to reveal the confidential communications that took place between him and his chiefs." The truth is not to be revealed. Young gentlemen, thinking to play a hand with our elderly statesmen, must understand the rules of this "game." The truth is always to be marked "Private and Confidential," to be locked up in the secret safe. History may find the key one day when our elderly statesmen have been gathered to their fathers, have passed away honored and revered with the nation's gratitude inscribed upon their expensive tombs. Meanwhile, if the people are really wanting to know, are demanding information, they shall not be sent empty

away. It is only the truth that must not be revealed to them.

Continues the Westminster Gazette, still reproving the sin of Mr. Bullitt: "The disclosure by an official of his private dealings with his superiors after he has resigned makes frank dealing impossible." (Somewhat quaint that phrase "frank dealing." May not "frank" be a misprint for "shady?") "If it were a general practice official life would be rendered intolerable." Such a nice young man. They thought he could be trusted with the secrets of the game. He might have become quite a useful confederate. Life is full of disappointments, even for the elderly cardsharper. Does it not occur to the Westminster Gazette and other leaders of the public conscience that there is something to be said for the making of unofficial lives tolerable—for the saving of millions of men, women and children from the tortures of war and famine, even at the supreme cost of making the lives of a few cunning old statesmen not tolerable? "Mr. Bullitt makes no allowance," points out the Westminster Gazette, more in sorrow than in anger, "for the network of traditions, conventions, and conflicting obligations in which for centuries European statesmanship has been involved." But those traditions, conventions and obligations of our rulers have made Europe for centuries the hell of common people! There is the tradition that the lives and fortunes of the common people are things to be squandered and debased, used as mere raw material for the building up of the interests of the few; the convention that no common man or woman has a right to spoil the "game" which a handful of useless old men play from century to century with the lives and the fortunes of the millions; there are those conflicting obligations between truth and lying, between honor and dishonor, between honesty and chicanery that so often end in our statesmen coming down on the Devil's side. "We are all aware," concludes the Westminster Gazette, "of what is amiss in Europe. We beg our American friends to lend us a hand in putting it straight." What is amiss in Europe, and not only in Europe, is that we have taken for our God the Father of Lies. Let Europe, and not only Europe, cleanse itself of the habit of lying. That new world you talk of, Mr. Lloyd George, will not be built upon lies. The spirit of lying spreads. It threatens to consume the earth. The dark ages of the world's beginning were filled with savagery and cruelty. But at least there was hope. The liar was outcast and shamed. Today he is leader of the people. Five hundred years ago the printing press was hailed as the chariot of Truth. It has been captured for the service of Lies. It starts each morning its daily round packed with falsehood, suppression and misrepresentation. For a wage, men of brains devote their lives to the dissemination of lies. Our press and our politics have become a byword for humbug and hypocrisy, and the people have grown so used to being lied to, that they are only amused. In our trade and commerce the gentle art of ly-

ing is taught and cultivated as an art. Our advertisement hoardings scream lies to us from every seething corner. Our pulpits are chiefly busy misrepresenting Christ, twisting His words and falsifying His teaching. An ambassador has been described as a man sent abroad to lie for his country. The definition has been accepted, and we speed his departure with laughter. A diplomatist has put it on record that when he wished to deceive he always told the truth. No one, of course believed him. President Wilson smilingly tells the American Senate that he plunged the American nation into war without knowing of the secret treaties her Allies had entered into for division of the spoil. What America was going out to fight for did not sufficiently interest him. But did not Mr. Balfour assure us that he informed President Wilson fully of all these secret treaties? No one is surprised or shocked. Some leader of the people has lied. Well, what if he did!

The Big Four solemnly pledge themselves to have done with secret

diplomacy. Open covenants. The first thing they do when they get to Versailles is to set about their work behind locked doors. The world is not even disappointed. We knew they would, we explain to one another. Did not they deliberately promise that they wouldn't? Our statesmen rise in Parliament and deliberately deceive us.

The whole world is rotten with lies. An American speaker at a public meeting, not so long ago, accounted for the tolerant attitude of American opinion towards graft by explaining that no man could be sure when the chance might come his way. The explanation was received with cheers and laughter. If there had been six honorable men in the room, it would have been resented as an insult. "Week by week, for the health of its soul, the world is called upon to hold its nose and inspect at close range the fetid and septic processes of diplomacy," writes the New York Nation. The world has no need to hold its nose. It has come to like the smell.

Ten Minutes' Talk With the Workers

(From the "Socialist," Glasgow.) * value of "putting a little bit away for a rainy day."

The Subject Matter of Economics

A favorite method of introducing the subject of economics, or political economy, is to begin by putting the query, "Why is it necessary that any work should be done in the world?" No doubt at first sight the question seems absurd, particularly to such as you and I who have never known or seen anything else but toil in front of us. Nevertheless, if you think for a moment you will find there is more in the query than appears on the surface.

You know, for instance, how big a part habit plays in our lives, and how a great many things that we do are only done because we have been in the habit of doing them for a long time. Indeed, in this direction, I would urge you just to watch your various actions and thoughts. You will find it a useful and interesting study in the art of self-discipline.

Habit in Relation to Work.

Suppose we consider, then, the question of work in relation to habit. Our actions and conduct in the main being largely the result of imitation, and if we agree upon that, then we might get some information on the question by observing what children or primitive people do. (We may take children and primitive people together, since their ways and habits are similar in many directions.)

These, then, seldom display that hustle and bustle or apparent anxiety for work which is the hall-mark of our present-day society. Primitive man, nearly all scientists tell us, only hunts, fishes, or works for the satisfaction of his immediate wants. Once he has gorged himself he is satisfied. He laughs in his simplicity at the suggestion of working beyond the needs of the moment, or what is strictly necessary. And while we may look back with sympathy and compassion on his crudeness of mind, we must remember that it has taken tens of thousands of years to see the

The Desire for Gain.

Perhaps we might name slavery and the desire for gain by property owners as the two principal causes leading to this conception. In addition to changed methods of production, with the lash of the whip or the fear of death, you can imagine how our forefathers would be compelled to work beyond what was necessary to satisfy their moderate needs. Even now, despite all our boasted civilization, the position is much the same, though in a different form. You will agree, I think, that it is not love of work in itself that compels you to get out of your nice comfortable bed—if you have one—to hurry off to the shop, yard or mine, there to spend the best part of the day, often doing something you detest, and fretting for the "buzzer" to signal stopping time. Why, then, do you stick it? Is it not because, like the slave of ancient times, you are compelled? And the analogy, is it not complete in the circumstance that you do it to satisfy the desire of gain by a minority? Thus it is seen that necessity is largely the mother of habit. That is why you often hear some people say "they can't do without working." Indeed, it is quite true in such cases that there is a certain uneasiness when unemployed, but putting necessity aside such a disposition merely emphasizes the tremendous influence of habit.

It is well you should have this relation of habit to work in your mind, as many writers on economics, who are interested argue that work is something innate, i.e., a natural endowment, with the obvious intention of convincing you and I not to entertain thoughts of refusing to work, especially for others.

Essentials of Mankind.

Putting aside, however, all considerations of class interests, there (Continued on Page Three)