



WHO ARE HONEST?

I SAID, in my haste, the other day when talking with a friend—

"The people of this country do not want honest government."

My friend demurred, insisting that they did, if they could get it; to which I replied, still somewhat hastily—"They wouldn't have it—if it were offered to them, they would reject it ignominiously." I furthermore asserted that if "a government of angels" established themselves at Ottawa and then appealed to the people, I doubted if they could carry a single constituency. My friend was inclined to grant that much. He said that he himself would not want "a government of angels"; but he was confident that, if a government of honest men were to appear, and the people were to believe that they were honest, they would be sustained. I scoffed at the idea. I instanced the case of Alexander Mackenzie, who tried his best to give this country honest government, and who lasted until exactly the first chance the people had to kick him into oblivion.

WELL, what do you think of it? Was I right; or was my friend nearer to the truth? Do you know, when I sit down to consider the matter in cold blood, I am very much inclined to think that, if I sinned at all, I sinned on the side of moderation of statement. What I should have said was that the people of this country not only did not want honest government, but neither did they want honest trade, honest industry, honest financing, honest anything. Honesty is no longer regarded as the best policy. Of course, we want other people to be honest with us—we want to get from them what we pay for—in fact, we would not object to getting a good deal more. We are not concerned, to be frank about it, that our neighbour with whom we are dealing shall be "honest"—we will be satisfied if he is gullible and slack in guarding his own interests. What we do not want him to do, is to cheat us. That we look upon as an intolerable outrage, and wonder how our poor humanity can have fallen so low. No one can beat us in deploring the decay in public morals when we have just been "done." Then we are the best little deplorers who ever got into the pulpit. But how about it when we get into a nice, large, loose, hazy "deal," and come out a few thousands better off than we were able to figure as at all possible? There must be somebody to the bad; but we don't most generally always advertise for them.

LET us suppose that an over-ruling Providence were to cause it to be known that He was about to take a universal plebiscite on a proposition to subject the human race to a new code of natural laws by which rigid honesty would be automatically established and divinely enforced in all human dealings. That is, after this new code of natural laws came into effect, no man could get a penny's worth of anything for which he had not given adequate value. All business would be so regulated, down to the last detail, that the gambler and the "fixer" and the "cornerer" and every person who now makes a little by getting ahead of the game a bit, would be entirely shut out; and so much labour or so much service would get exactly so much return every time. Absolute honesty would reign. Now let us suppose that Providence put it to a vote whether this new code of natural laws should come into effect—laws making it as impossible to be dishonest as it is now impossible to escape the force of gravitation—are you quite sure it would carry—IF WE ALL VOTED BY SECRET BALLOT? Do the majority of us want to be compelled to take our honest deserts at all times—and nothing more?

I SHOULD tremendously like to see it tried. It is my irresponsible and unworthy opinion that about the only classes of people who could be confidently depended upon to vote for the adoption of such an embargo on "business shrewdness" would be the hopelessly "down-and-outs" who can never dream of getting ahead of a human snail, and the diminishing few who are thoroughly afraid of going

to hell. Most other human beings live on the expectation of some day running into a stroke of luck, and getting a good big "wad" for which they have not worked. They may never do it. The chances are that they will lose far more than they will ever gain by this game of "beggar my neighbour." But they cherish the hope—they would feel that life held little for them if it did not suggest that sometime, somewhere, they would be able to steal a nice juicy surreptitious competency. Thus any proposal to make honesty a natural law would kill the dearest hope in many a breast. I am not bothering now with the able and adroit few who have achieved a great success at dishonesty. Their opinion goes without saying. You might as well expect a "merger" millionaire to vote for a bill making "mergering" a capital offence—and containing a retroactive clause. I am talking of the "merged" millions—those who are losing constantly in this game of "grab"—the fools who are plundered in ten transactions and then pick up a dishonest penny on the eleventh. They would "plump" against making honesty inevitable. They still hope to steal successfully.

IN the midst of such a community, what is the use of talking about "honest government"? Will you find me one man who does business with any "government," and never thinks that he might get more for his goods or his work from that impersonal and generous "government" than he would be likely to get if he were dealing with a shrewd fellow-citizen? We all expect a "government job" to pay better than another. That is just about how much we want honest government. Some of us could stand honest grocering or honest drugging or honest doctoring; but we would quickly revolt at the quixotic notion that the government should be honest. Take an example. Let any government propose to run the Intercolonial Railway exactly as the C. P. R. runs its lines; and how many constituencies along that national highway will that government carry? But, lest the non-Intercolonial provinces assume righteous and superior airs, let us ask another question—How many constituencies would be held by a government which should build its public works, run them, and distribute its offices in those constituencies strictly on business principles? What chance would such a government have against an opposition which should promise to restore the present system? There isn't a politician, living or dead—at least, since poor old broken Mackenzie went—who would venture to the country on such a platform. Good Sir Oliver Mowat—that immaculate statesman—told a company of his "workers" one day—"Gentlemen, we have given you honest government—we have given you government as honest as was PRACTICABLE."

THE MONOCLE MAN.



APPEARANCES, after all, are very deceptive. Most of us, reading the story of mediaeval ferocities, conjure up in our minds pictures of the stern and cruel auto-crats who thrust their victims into dungeons, or sent them to the torture chamber or the stake. These pictures are painted in lurid lines—the cold, glittering eye, the thin-lipped cruel mouth, the prominent despotic nose, the low-sloping forehead, and the hard, aggressive chin.

Don't be too sure about it all. It is more than probable that, a few hundred years hence, when Canadians study history and read the primitive tale of "early times" when Parliament cast men into prison for refusing to answer questions, just as they did in the Old World centuries before, they will picture William Sora Middlebro, of North Grey, the avenger and prosecutor, much as we picture the persecutors of civilization's yesterday. Imaginative nurse-maids may terrify their timid charges by threats that this Bad Man of the Past will get them if they don't watch out, and possibly those learned in nomenclature may establish beyond peradventure that he was a ferocious Russian despot and properly spelled his name Middleborovitch.

But, really and truly, the member for North Grey is no terrifying Bogey Man. He is a tender, sensitive soul—and looks the part. The gaunt, sombre and apparently ill-nourished Meighan, who seconded his efforts at parliamentary jail-delivery, resembles the typical inquisitor. But not Middlebro, really and truly, no. Middlebro is dilettante and sentimental. He thinks more of the Ladies' Gallery than the parliamentary forum below. He revels in dainty social functions. His eyes have a soulful look and his lips whisper the most alluring pretty things. He "dances divinely" and is "such a charming man." At eventide he wanders oft-times to some alcove-secluded piano and releases the soft, sweet strains of "The Rosary." Graceful, gallant and musical mystic, this—no brutal propagandist of czarism. Let history be warned in time.

Middlebro didn't mean it—really he didn't. He simply wanted to discipline this disrespectful Montreal man who didn't answer questions. But, like the youth who essayed to capture the wild cat, he found it easier to get hold of the animal than to let go. When Parliament sensed the situation it went out into the corridors and laughed, laughed long and loud, and the cynical newspaper men sent out stories which set the country smiling. Middlebro's hair

would have turned grey, had he had any. As it was, the furrows of a great care began to destroy the shining symmetry of a glowing baldness.

Middlebro does not mind being sighed over, but he cannot stand being smiled over. He consulted with Meighan, his diligent, zealous and original Man Friday. "Thrust the incorrigible offender into the dungeon," said the latter in his sternest tones. Middlebro agreed. "I don't want to hurt him," he murmured compassionately, "but we can't stand this," alluding to the smile—the nasty satirical smile—with which two passing Conservatives had just greeted them.

So Miller the Delinquent was again called before the Bar of the House and informed of his fate. The question was put to him: "To whom did you pay this money you paid out to secure Government business?" or words to that effect. Which goes to show that, whatever their weaknesses, Middlebro and Meighan are skilled lawyers. It reminds one of the story of the query put to a timid benedict: "Have you stopped beating your wife—yes or no, sir?"

Poor fellow, no matter how he answered, he was gone!

WHILE English-speaking members of Parliament have much to learn from their French-speaking colleagues in the mastery of both languages, occasionally the latter make amusing slips, particularly in the quoting of English slang and "sayings." The other day, when Hon. Rodolphe Lemieux, himself a master of both languages, was engaged in one of his periodic bouts with Hon. Louis Philippe Pelletier, his successor as Postmaster-General, Ferdinand Joseph Robidoux came gallantly to the rescue of the Minister.

"Whenever the honourable member for Rouville opens his mouth," Mr. Robidoux gravely informed the Speaker, "he puts his foot in the mud."

LET cynics who think that no good thing can come from a politician lend their ears and listen. While debating the live question of over-capitalization of public service corporations last week, a page approached the desk of Mr. J. G. Turriff, the western Liberal from Assiniboia, and laid a "rush" telegram on his desk. As soon as he concluded his remarks the member examined its contents. He read: "May I draw upon you at sight for