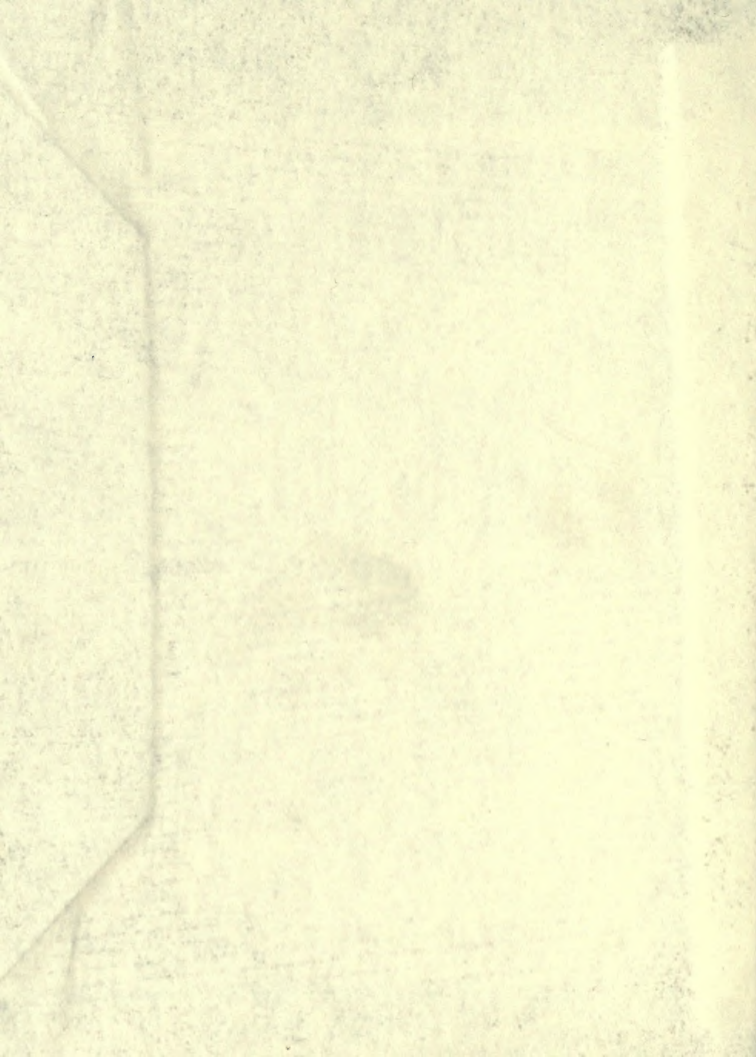




3 1761 05262440 0

HF
5386
H68
1918
c.1

ROBA





Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

R287 148

The
Blessing of Business

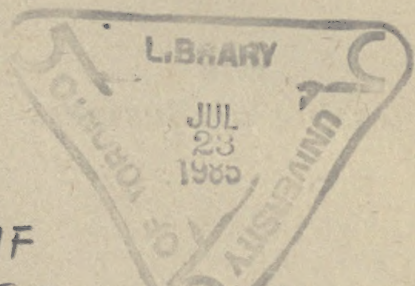


By E. W. HOWE

Author of "The Story of a Country Town,"
"A Moonlight Boy," etc.



Crane & Company, Publishers
Topeka, Kansas
1918



HF

5386

H68

1918

Copyright 1918
By E. W. HOWE

“Astounding hypocrisy is the chief symbol of our American, life which leads us habitually, and upon all subjects that most intimately concern us, to formulate two distinct sets of opinions, one of which we mouth magnificently, and the other of which we cherish and put into practice in secret. On the one hand, in almost any field you choose, there is the doctrine that is sweet-sounding; and on the other hand there is the doctrine that will work.—*H. L. Mencken.*

THE BLESSING OF BUSINESS.

I.

The first principle is life ; the second, maintenance of life. The thing of greatest human interest and importance, therefore, is the production and distribution of food, the manufacture of necessities ;

Or what we call *Business*.

Religion, education, art, politics, are all secondary to it, since we live because of our work ; and without life we should need neither salvation, learning, homes, literature, nor anything else. Business is nothing more than food-getting ; incidentally, it

means founding a home, a family, assisting in building a school, a road, a street, and finally, appreciation of a painting, a book, a sermon, or a poem.

Of living creatures, business men are nearest sane; their philosophy is as accurate as their multiplication table.

All should have ideals they cannot quite reach; all should be a little high-minded, and accomplish some of the greater good; but it is business men who know these things may easily be made professional and mischievous.

In thousands of years there has been no advance in public morals, in philosophy, in religion or in politics,

but the advance in business has been the greatest miracle the world has ever known. The business man knows the weakness of propositions ; the danger signs, the failings of men ; he knows how much statements should be discounted, and herein lies his value to the world. The statement is always being made that the business man has no appreciation of anything except money ; he is frankly accused of lack of interest in patriotism, liberty, art, and the finer feelings generally ; it is contended that all he contributes to higher things is coaxed out of him by orators and writers.

The world is full of business men who have as beautiful dreams as the

professionals, but who have learned to know where the absurd begins.

Every great improvement in the world's history is due, directly or indirectly, to the munificence of some man successful in the world's affairs. Every great charitable institution is founded on the surplus earnings of active men, who did good while earning their money, and, having learned philanthropy, closed their lives with a burst of it. Look up the history of nearly any institution of learning or art gallery, and you will find an endowment from a practical man. The men of great learning did not build the institutions in which they teach, although nearly all of them unjustly criticise the men who did.

In a newspaper I find a statement that the publication of a new encyclopedic library, embodying the entire field of human knowledge, is assured, Adolph Lewisohn having decided to back the publication financially. Who is Adolph Lewisohn? A business man. Who will do the work of preparing the new encyclopedic library? Professors, all working at good salaries. Who is entitled to credit for the work, the professors or the business man?

I believe the most useful man who has ever lived is John D. Rockefeller, a business man, because of the Rockefeller Foundation, which will devote four or five million dollars a year to human betterment as long as the

world endures. I judge Rockefeller with the impartiality I judge Hannibal, Napoleon, Lincoln, Clay, Webster, or any other noted character. That he has a great mind and heart cannot be disputed fairly. I have read his interviews and memoirs, so far as they have been published, and they have not impressed me; but the man has been made timid by the unjust hatred of his fellow men. No one knows the real Rockefeller, except possibly his son. I judge Rockefeller, Sr., by the facts of history, two of which are that he met the keenest men of his time in fair competition, and outranked them, and that he devised and executed the world's greatest benevolence. Given

the applause of any one of our more popular statesmen, the common sense of Rockefeller, Sr., might have saved this nation much disaster now threatening.

Business is the definition of the greatest of all words, *Industry*, and no man can prove he is industrious unless he has some measure of success to his credit. The real American hero is the man who, in spite of a poor home, poor schooling, and residence in a poor neighborhood, becomes a successful and useful citizen; who somehow acquires politeness, education, and appreciation of the world's important lessons. Because a workman is advanced to foreman, superintendent, or proprietor,

he does not lose the manhood which distinguished him as a member of his union ; he is no less a man because he has been promoted on merit ; promotion does not cause him to lose all sense of right, correct living and justice to his fellow men.

I care nothing for the accidental rich, but for those good workmen who rise by sheer merit, I have honest admiration. There are a few unworthy sons who have inherited wealth, but we should not, because of them, unfairly criticise their worthy fathers, who were first industrious, fair and polite, and finally successful.

There are only a few of the shoddy rich ; but there are millions rich in character, usefulness and intelligence,

and with enough success to their credit to be envied by the shiftless. Abuse of business in abuse of industry.

Dr. Russell H. Conwell investigated the history of four thousand successful American business men ; he found that all but seventeen of them began life poor ; that all but a pitiful forty of them contributed largely to their several communities. So it seems that the great American rewards are for the sons of poor men who become industrious, well-behaved, successful, and then as useful as selfish men can afford.

It is snobbery to pretend that character may not accompany position or wealth. The talk that the

greater the rogue the greater the fortune, originated with thieves, and they have failed to make their doctrine good. If you want to hear that there is no chastity among women, associate with those who are wretched outcasts because of lack of chastity; if you want to hear that a successful business man cannot be honest, associate with men who are themselves unclean in thought and practice.

II.

When you visit a public park, you note that the bronze and marble statues usually represent statesmen, warriors or poets. They should represent the more useful business men ; so should the pictures on postage stamps and paper money. Look at the average community, and consider what business men have done for it ; the teachers, preachers, statesmen, writers, artists and orators, however creditable they may be, have not done as much.

The public has always been plundered, and always will be, but since men are more careful in paying out money than they are in voting, a

business institution is always held to a stricter accountability than a public man ; and this is the reason business is the cleanest thing we have. Men investigate money problems with all the practical sense and experience at command, but in everything else they are sentimental ; and sentiment is neither honest nor careful. There is trickery in every human transaction ; every man with whom you deal charges more than he should if you do not watch him ; but it is an absurdity to believe that only business is tricky, and needs watching. The earnings of no statesman are as fairly gained as the five per cent of the packing houses or the railroads ; every merchant, farmer,

mechanic, banker or manufacturer
earns his money more honorably than
any politician.

III.

Every man wishes, and properly, to make money. The surest way to make money is to be industrious, polite, temperate and honorable; the more persistently a man practices these good habits, the more money he will make, and the more useful he will become. The men of greatest usefulness are those who have a surplus; those who have only good will and love for their fellows cannot equal in well-doing those who have money and success to their credit. Nearly every man who accumulates a surplus, finally accumulates, also, a disposition to help the weak. Our successful men do not hoard their

gold, and gloat over it: they are great spenders, and leave a trail of prosperity behind them. The disposition of the successful to help others is growing, and it has always been a prominent human characteristic.

If you have not succeeded, give your son a chance. And he cannot have a chance if there are no successful institutions, and no successful men to die and require successors.

Our plan of permitting the industrious to accumulate a competence is right; there is more to it than the fact that fortunes are made; the men who make money are, as a very general rule, also industrious, capable and useful. There are objections to

the system which permits a man to accumulate more than he needs, but the system also has its advantages: more advantages than disadvantages, or men would not maintain it century after century. First among the advantages of the system is that it is an incentive to every man to become a respectable and useful citizen. The system is at the very foundation of our civilization, and we should not abolish it because of an occasional fortune put to bad use. For every fortune wasted, I can name many which have been of the greatest service to humanity; for every fortune made by speculation bordering on dishonesty, I can name hundreds made by honest and useful work.

If successful men were a privileged class, every decent citizen would have a right to protest against the present system; but in the United States there is no law granting one man rights another does not possess, except that there are laws favoring the poor, and discriminating against the successful. We have a high and low caste, but anyone may get into the better class; caste in the United States is settled after birth.

I am not a rich man, and never will be; I would feel as uncomfortable in a palace as in a hovel, but I am not a toady. Nearly everyone dislikes a particularly rich or noted man, and I confess I do. I am of the opinion that the rich should be

threatened sufficiently to keep them reasonably modest, but I have never believed the well-to-do and noted are less honest, patriotic, fair or useful than I am. I believe their moral standards are at least equal to mine. I know I have had exactly the same chance in the world. Besides, I have observed that most men, on their way up the ladder to success, have accomplished a good many creditable things.

The most agreeable people I know are those of about my own station in life; those who have had enough bad luck to keep them reasonably modest. I have lived a long time, and have known many worthy men and women, but have never known

a hero or heroine, though I know many men of whom I often think: "How dull they are! And how well they have succeeded!"

I admire the men who work regular and long hours, are fairly good citizens, and patiently take their chances in life's lottery. There are millions of them, and they are succeeding. And in becoming successful, they accomplished nothing that is not natural.

Drive through any agricultural community, and you will find plenty of farmers who are successful because of good habits. You will find successful men in every shop, store, office and bank. Working under them you will find younger men who

are obeying the rules, and who will become successful in time ; there are millions of these young men toiling away patiently, cheerfully and effectively. They are not entitled under the hard rules made by the world to jump into distinction in a day, but when their time comes, they will be recognized in the degree they deserve.

Genius is born, and very rare, but a money-maker is made ; if the average man will observe a few simple rules, he cannot very well avoid becoming well-to-do. First in the list is industry ; but he must be polite and fair, because these simple virtues are of almost equal importance : the man who makes a profit from my

grocery trade must have a good stock of politeness and fairness, as well as a good stock of groceries. Many geniuses have been idlers and drunkards, and became famous over night, but no idler or drunkard ever succeeded in business.

I sing the praise of the average man; and the average man succeeds in some degree. I have sympathy for those who fail, whatever the cause; but the men who work hard and progress slowly to success are entitled to first consideration. There are only a few of the very poor and the very rich; but there are millions who are getting along comfortably, and who will be better off in a few years than they are now. In a little

while our distinguished men will be dead, and younger men will occupy their places; our great men are not only those who have arrived, but those who are on the way.

IV.

It has long been known that what we call "booming" is dangerous in business; but we do not seem to know that booming in morals, patriotism, religion or art is equally dangerous. Herbert Spencer took thirty-two acts of the English Parliament, and had them traced down by a force of clerks. He found that twenty-nine of them produced an effect contrary to the effect intended. This is dangerous booming in patriotism.

I dislike over-wrought sentiment as I dislike unnecessary filth, and believe it is as harmful as polluted water or bad air; yet it has become

entrenched in our affairs, public and private, to such an extent that respectable and important truth is opposed to our detriment. I have as beautiful and foolish fancies as anyone, but am ashamed of them; I never hear a great musical performance that I am not moved to tears, but actually have no respect for the elves released by the performance of an orchestra or chorus.

V.

Of all ambitions, the most alluring to mankind is the ambition to make fame and fortune by doing good. To the public speaker there is great fascination in the thought of addressing and moving hundreds of people, at the same time doing them good, and receiving fifty cents admission from each one. Thousands of boomers fail at the fascinating game of public speaking or writing, and become mischievous disturbers.

How the term "Public Service" is overworked! The profound fellows who write for the magazines say everyone should be devoted to the public service; the orators claim

they have consecrated their lives to it; women agitators, ministers, socialists, labor leaders, editors of newspapers, missionaries, all claim to be devoted to the public service. But in spite of the devotion of these ladies and gentlemen, no people get such wretched public service as we do. There is little honesty in it; little economy; little patriotism; those occupying public positions regard the people as fools to deceive.

We all begin life with an ambition to succeed, but in case of failure there does not seem to be a man fair enough to admit why he failed, or why another succeeded. The most popular literature is unfair abuse of the successful; the greatest phrase-

maker is the most popular man in the United States today, while our greatest philanthropist is the most thoroughly despised.

People have an unfortunate habit of petting themselves: they have carried it so far that some of them say they will never die. They admit that while they may be compelled to go through the grave as a preparation, they will be resurrected, and live in endless bliss, as they deserve. Naturally they add to this doctrine that the present necessity of working is not natural, and that those who indulge in it are vulgar and sordid.

Practically all writers and public speakers say materialism is dangerous to higher civilization; it is

actually the only straight road to the highest civilization possible. I know of no greater folly than trying to live a spiritual life in a world undoubtedly material. The really spiritual nations are notoriously worthless; before we do the best we can, we must first look facts in the face, and act upon them. So far as civilization is breaking down, it is due to the individual faults of the people; we have every public right we can have. No law is lacking that would give the people greater opportunity. Law cannot make the individual sensible, thrifty and efficient; law may only prohibit, not prevent.

An elderly man once told me he had been persecuted all his life be-

cause he insisted on doing right. He declared that his superior officers were thieves; and the same charge was made against associates of only a little higher rank than his own. Did this man actually believe he had been persecuted all his life because of his determination to be honest? Possibly he did; we all have a disposition that way, and all our education encourages it. The man who receives \$100 a month is apt to believe that his associate who gets \$200 is a rascal. And the man worth \$50,000 believes that the man worth \$100,000 accumulated his fortune by means of trickery; while millionaires are so generally hated that they are always attacked, often unfairly,

by Legislatures, political conventions and newspapers. Yet the morals of the two hundred dollar a month man average with the morals of the man receiving only half as much; the morals of the man with a fortune of fifty or a hundred thousand dollars average no better than the morals of the millionaire. Riches are like education: we all have exactly the same chance, and poor men criticise the rich no more generally than the uneducated sneer at the educated.

If a man is lazy, shiftless and unreliable, there is no power on earth that will make him prosperous and respected. If a man has bad habits, he must overcome them, or suffer the consequences. Emerson said: "If

the black man is feeble, and not important to the existing races, not on a parity with the best race, the black man must serve. I say to you, you must save yourself, black or white, man or woman; other help is none." We engaged in a terrible war to help the black man, and spent billions of money in his interest, but we admit now that he must save himself. Exactly the same thing is true of the white man. If he is feeble, unreliable, and not important to his race, and not on a parity with average men, he must serve; other help is none. The churches and conventions have fought for inferior man since time began, but he is still where he was at the beginning, and always

will be, unless he helps himself, which he may usually do.

We know our present social system (although imperfect, like every other human thing, and subject to careful modification) is effective, because we have created, while living under it, a country where there is more liberty and prosperity than ever existed before in any period in the past. The best evidence that we cannot afford to throw away this system to try exploded experiments, is the fact that we do not do it.

We do not cut the throats of successful men and divide their property because there is doubt that it is the best way: we are willing to do it, but have a suspicion that successful

men are, after all, useful; that it is best, in the long run, to protect a man in the possession of what he fairly earns. Every man wants such protection, and grudgingly grants it to others.

I believe in any system the people have tried a long time, and found most expedient. The plans men have adopted are better than the plans they have talked about, and neglected to put into effect because of doubt of utility; it is foolish to say Henry George thought out a better tax system than the system worked out by all men as a result of time and experience.

Whatever progress is made, the Majority makes; I know nothing in

which the majority is habitually wrong; when the Majority makes a mistake, it will inevitably correct it; the Majority cannot afford to follow a bad plan when a better one may be found, and only does it until the better plan appears and demonstrates itself. There is something wrong with every doctrine the Majority does not put into effect. I cannot believe that mankind, after experimenting with life for thousands of years, finally adopted the worst system, and steadily refuses to put into effect a better.

Therefore I believe in the best workmen being made foremen, and general superintendents, and general managers. In every place where men

toil there are inexperienced workmen who need direction, in order that they may better learn their trade, and themselves become foremen and superintendents. There is the same reason for foremen, superintendents, and rules and laws, that there is for giving a father authority to direct his children. Workmen are constantly becoming foremen and superintendents; children are constantly becoming parents; poor men are constantly becoming rich men. Occasionally you find a worthy insurgent in advance of the people, but the people soon catch up. I believe in the present System because whatever the critics may say, they actually accept it in their practical

affairs. When the critics reach perfection, rest assured the people will.

I believe promotion in business is a gauge by which men may be fairly judged. Take a hundred locomotive engineers, and they will average a little better in reliability, temperance, fairness and politeness than their firemen. A hundred wholesale grocers will average a little better than a hundred retail grocers; a hundred owners of farms will average a little higher than a hundred renters.

It is true in every trade, calling and profession.

No business can succeed or become useful unless it makes money; every great thing in the world's history has resulted from men working

for profit. There is no good result Idealism strives for that business men do not actually accomplish, when accomplishment is possible.

I am a believer in the people. Whatever they have worked out in their homes, in their places of business, and on the highways and markets, I believe in. If I had young children, I should rather have them taught by the better class business men than by statesmen, orators, or dreamers.

The world's weakness is not that we have many successful men and institutions ; the real menace is that so many men are poor, and so many institutions weak and unprofitable, for failure, in most cases, is the re-

sult of carelessness, of idleness; of neglect of simple and important rules that long experience has taught.

There is a reason why some people are rich, and this reason is not discreditable; on the contrary, it usually indicates thrift, good sense and hard work. Go into any community, and compare the dozen most successful men with the twelve poorest, and it is nonsense to say that those selected because of their prosperity are more vulgar, ignorant or unprincipled than those selected because of their poverty. The men who succeed are nearly always forceful and useful characters; they stand well everywhere, except in literature.

The man who does me most good

is he who sells me necessary supplies and conveniences at a low price, because of economies of production ; I can give myself more good advice than I can possibly take. Great business establishments of every kind are not manufactured over night ; they are the result of years of labor on the part of worthy men. Behind nearly every noted family in this country you will find useful pioneering in business, which teaches modesty, industry, fairness, education, progress and practical common sense, while Statesmanship teaches shorter hours and louder talk. We Americans have reached a dangerous attitude in public affairs ; a nation may engage in a wrong policy that will

wreck it; a sound national policy is even more important than a sound individual policy, since a bad national policy means final disaster to millions, while a bad individual policy may mean only disaster to an individual and his family.

VI.

Many people seem to believe business is Original Sin; it is really the most respectable and useful human activity. It is business men who know best that the civilities of life are respectable and profitable; go into a successful place of business anywhere, and you may depend upon politeness and fairness. It is in the store or office of the failure where you are treated uncivilly or dishonestly.

The principles of business are just; they give every man the same chance; we know no other real democracy. Business is fanatical in nothing.

Revolution is only agreeable when it is brewing; when it breaks, and the furies are unchained, the people begin clamoring for order. It is to the credit of business men that they steadfastly oppose the world-old mistake of anarchy; business men know that revolution is followed by years of destruction and murder, and finally a return to old conditions.

The rich man is objectionable, but not so objectionable as the professional disturber who is forever preaching a Brotherhood of Man he does not believe in, since he would promptly desert his doctrine if he should in some way suddenly achieve fame and fortune.

Matches are a great convenience

to me, and I really contribute very little to the Match King's private yacht and swagger; it is no hardship to pay four cents for a box of matches—it would be a hardship were not matches sold at present low prices. In spite of his display of prosperity the Match King is really a useful man: not as useful as he should be, but still useful in many ways. And remember that millions of men are not useful; that they are burdensome to the communities in which they live, and to the world.

There are thousands of men who have made fortunes canning vegetables. Before these fortunes were made, hundreds of men spent many years and great sums of money in

perfecting the different processes. These men have been of the greatest use to the world; the Match Kings, Vegetable Kings, Money Kings, and successful men of every other sort, were useful while making their money. Thomas Edison may be arrogant because of his great success—I have never heard that he is—but think of the usefulness of the man, and forgive his vanity. I am able to live more conveniently, comfortably and economically because of Edison's fortune; he won what he has in fair competition with other men, and at least we have not been taxed to enrich him, as we are in the case of thousands of useless public men. Edison has never robbed me;

on the contrary, he has benefited me, and I will not hate and misrepresent him. I can more easily forgive his vanity because he is a king among men than I can forgive the shiftlessness of the thousands of others who increase my burdens.

And there are millions of successful men more modest than the Match Kings, or kings of business in other lines; in every community you find that a considerable majority of the people are successful in greater or less degree. Every year millions of worthy men are promoted to better positions; the world is a great training camp. Those who succeed in country towns go to the cities; and business is the base of it all.

Every professional teacher arouses a certain opposition ; we know it is his business to teach, and that possibly he teaches some things that are to his interest rather than to ours, but the man who teaches good lessons by example is a real force. This is the special mission of the successful business man.

When parents tell their sons to be good boys, and amount to something, it is usually interpreted as advice that they become preachers, teachers, writers, artists, doctors or lawyers. There has always been a prejudice against the long hours and hard work connected with business.

The fairest publications issued today are devoted to business. They

do not wantonly and notoriously advocate any untruth; they come nearer being fair with the other side than any other class of publications. The explanation is that business men are trained in accepting palpable facts, and in rejecting palpable absurdities. Business is founded on simple experience, which is truth; so it is the fairest thing we have. A good business man rarely cares for gossip that is untrue; he may dislike his rival, and usually does, but he does not say he is a fool when he is really a clever man; he does not say he is a thief when the evidence shows he is reliable and obliging. This commendable attitude of business men is having an effect; it is

being copied. I note with pleasure that the Bishop and the editor of *The Truth Seeker* are lately treating each other with more fairness. *The Truth Seeker* is becoming less violent, and the Bishop is notably improving in the same way. The superior common sense and fairness of business men is the force that will finally make the foolish old world sensible, in case such a thing is possible.

VII.

The average American citizen is, I regret to confess, a great dunce in some respects. About so often he feels that he is expected to declare that We are the Richest Nation in the World, although he may know that individually he and his neighbors are not prospering greatly, and that we need to confess that in this country there are millions who are poor. But above all, in his boasting he doesn't stop to think that his big talk has a tendency to increase the extravagance at Washington, at State capitals, and at county seats.

About so often, also, he tells how patriotic he is, and rather broadly

intimates that while he is ordinarily peaceable, and a kind and indulgent husband and father, he would on occasion hurry away to war, and do something terrible to our enemies.

In the same sentimental way he frequently tells how gallant he is to the ladies, with the result that they often impose upon him unmercifully.

He tells grandly how we are a Christian nation, devoted to world-freedom; he talks about the Spiritual Side of man, and his higher ambitions, having read about such things in newspaper, magazine or book in the evening or on Sunday. Sentimental editors and orators exhibit him as teachers exhibit their pupils when there are visitors at the

school, and he holds up his hand or arises to his feet at chautauquas or revivals. He does these things because he has been told they are to his credit ; and after he has put himself on record so frequently as a Patriot, a Christian, a Gallant Husband, etc., he is ashamed to protest when the leaders call on him for sacrifices he cannot afford, or does not believe to be necessary.

Our public folly is due to this moral cowardice of the Average Citizen, who almost advocates anarchy in his devotion to fine sentiments.

Why have we not gone all the way? Who has supplied the saving grace? Why have we not gone as far as the Russians or Mexicans? Cer-

tainly newspapers and politicians have taught anarchy. What has held us in check?

I believe the credit is due the better class business men; they often seem half ashamed of their common sense, but they believe in it, and teach it, greatly to the world's advantage. Give a politician great responsibility, and he goes crazy; the same test sobers a business man. To think correctly and sensibly is as natural with him as to dodge when a missile is thrown at him. It is his training, and proper training will finally get rid of bad education.

Everybody agrees that our public affairs are wrong. Many suggest that we try a different form of gov-

ernment. Why not first try giving business men control, instead of politicians and statesmen? Mischievous New Thought is being distributed as liberally as a weed throws its seeds to the four winds, but there are a few simple principles that must be respected. Who know them best? Business men. Where do the great ideas, thoughts and improvements come from? From the market-places and fields. Science is only human experience corrected and catalogued. And he who knows his community knows the world, since one community is like another, in a little different form. There is not in New York a peculiar type of man who thinks of things that have not been thought of

by some one in the vicinity of Vandalia, Illinois, or Emporia, Kansas.

Literary men write about the dark woods in terms of mystery, but practical men have charted them, and are able to tell you the meaning of the darkness and the moaning. University professors, editors and statesmen are specialists; they do not come in contact with the real problems of life as do farmers, bankers, mechanics, merchants, and other men active in real affairs. Of the professors it may be said they are mainly modest, and realize their inability to direct in practical affairs, but editors and statesmen, hidden away in private rooms, where they smoke and write, have become dictators. The

people who are not politicians must organize to protect themselves from those who are. Politics has finally become a menace to the country, yet I do not believe one man out of fifty realizes it.

Under our political system we train men at public expense to disturb us. They enter college with a view of engaging in public life; from a small office and small salary they graduate to a larger one, and their quarrels with each other over preferment become mischievous and expensive.

The old English idea was that a man engaged in trade ought to be excluded from public functions, and could not be a gentleman. The truth

is that the bulk of our gentlemen are, or have been, in trade, and we can never have reasonably satisfactory public service until they are given charge of public affairs. Nearly every successful and useful man acquires gentility with his years and experience; a gentleman is anyone who has sufficient ability and character to become one. Some of the most agreeable and perfect gentlemen I know came from the Proletariat. They were born into rude families, and as boys lived among rude neighbors, but as they looked at the world, they discovered the importance of gentility. It is absurd to say a man is born a gentleman; gentility is an acquirement, like an

education, or ability to play on a musical instrument. One of the most perfect gentlemen of my acquaintance didn't know enough as a boy to take his hat off when he entered a strange house; neither his father, his mother or his neighbors taught him this simple preliminary in ordinary gentility; but he soon learned it when he went out into the world as a bound boy. He had no education, but acquired one; he was poor, but became well-to-do; he lacked politeness, but acquired it. No difference how lowly a man is born, if he becomes a reliable, useful, upright and polite citizen, he is a gentleman; and if a man born in a mansion becomes idle and dissipated,

he is not a gentleman. The real meaning of Democracy is that anyone living under such a government may become a gentleman; that all have the privilege of outgrowing ignorance, poor birth, poverty and incivility.

VIII.

I take an interest in medical advertising; not because I use medicine, but because of the surprising exaggeration of the advertisers, and the lamentable certainty that millions of worthy people are harmed by it. Men and women print testimonials of benefits that are without the slightest foundation in fact; one newspaper quotes a former English cabinet minister as saying that a certain worthless medicine is a "national necessity." In the same announcement, four famous men are quoted as giving great credit to a remedy that deserves none at all.

I do not merely *think* I know these

widely proclaimed remedies are not remedies ; I *know* it.

On the other hand, I know I may adopt health suggestions made by my grandmother, and repeated by simple and intelligent people ever since, with prompt and unmistakable benefit. These suggestions are known to everyone, cost nothing, and are effective without doubt ; anyone may test them, and receive benefit—not in the distant future, but within the day of trial.

I know, also, that the simple rules of life taught by my grandparents, my parents, my neighbors, are efficient, while the great remedies advocated in books, in magazines, in

newspapers and by orators, are often mischievous, and never work.

I have a body, and can't make it over; no one can make it over for me. If we should all give our best efforts to changing the natural rules governing our bodies, and contribute liberally of our means, we couldn't do it. I learn from old books and from old men that the ancients had the same experiences I am having, and that they had the same bodies we have today; that those who have gone before were deceived by the same shrewd advertisers, who became rich and famous in that day as they do in this, and that finally they could not change the natural rules. The

gentleman who says that if we will elect him to Congress he will make easier rules, is a deceiver as surely as is the man who says he can change our bodies with a dollar bottle of medicine on which he makes an unfair profit.

How promptly I have been punished for intemperance, laziness, unfairness! The devil has never once forgiven me. But I have been benefited with equal certainty when I have accepted the simple, sensible, just rules my neighbors have taught me. And the most reliable of these neighbors have been business men: by which I mean the workers, as distinguished from those who live by their wits.

There is a fairness among the physical scientists I have long admired. When a new theory is announced, the specialists of different nations examine it, and pick it to pieces. If it turns out to be a discovery, it is admitted and accepted, and thereafter taught. Business men are gradually accepting the same policy; they supply the world's sober second thought. They are our most numerous and active class, and make many mistakes, but their best teaching is founded on truth. The best teaching of many other men is not.

IX.

If we know the simple rules governing life, and that its conditions are fixed and unchanging, we need not greatly care about guesses called "the deeper significance of it all," since no two of the guesses agree.

I wished to visit a neighboring town called Leavenworth. I heard that the road was plainly marked, and found that it was. The people I met on the way were exactly like those I had known all my life, as were their houses, live stock, churches, villages, kitchens, parlors, marriages, funerals.

Where did these people originate? It is an interesting speculation, but

not comparable in interest to the certainty that they are here, and that I am compelled to deal with them a few years.

How did the world originate? I do not know; but I know its rules, and that they will certainly endure as long as they are of interest to me.

And the road to Mandalay is as plainly marked as the road to Leavenworth. I have been around the world, and can attest that every reasonable thing I have heard about distant places turned out to be true; accurate reports of Singapore, Shanghai, Tokio, Cairo, Zanzibar, Melbourne, Rome, Jerusalem, Aden, London, Bombay, Trinidad, Paris, and New York had reached me at

my home far in the interior of the United States.

The first duty of every man is to acquire as much common sense as possible as soon as possible. Whatever a man's natural handicaps may be, the sooner he acquires common sense, the sooner he is able to take advantage of his opportunities, the sooner he makes the best of his life.

A writing man is something of a black sheep, like the village fiddler. Occasionally a fiddler becomes a violinist, and is a credit to his family, but as a rule he would have done better had his tendency been toward industry and saving. It doesn't actually make much difference what literary men say in their writings ;

their business is to entertain, to make you laugh, or cry, or indignant, not to instruct. For instruction, go to professors in the University of Fact.

I contend only for old and simple principles we know to be true and important. I have no New Notions; no New Thought; I am no New Voice, or Discovery; simply an old foggy pleading for more common sense, more efficiency, more politeness, more fairness, more temperance.

One of the living, certain truths is that the vital forces with which we are compelled to deal are alive, and forever screaming that their well-established and well-known laws must be obeyed. The big questions

of possible importance often obscure simple questions of undoubted importance. A philosophy requiring large volumes to print is too much; a hundred pages is enough.

X.

H. L. Mencken, said to be one of three men in the United States whose critical judgments are of most value, recently wrote :

“Astounding hypocrisy is the chief symbol of our American life, which leads us habitually, and upon almost all subjects that most intimately concern us, to formulate two distinct sets of opinions, one of which we mouth magnificently, and the other of which we cherish and put into practice in secret. On the one hand, in almost any field you choose, there is the doctrine that is sweet-sounding; and on the other hand there is the doctrine that works.”

If what this writer says is true—and there is general agreement that it is—what excuse can we give for our daily practices and convictions? If they are wrong, we should correct them; if they are right, we should publicly maintain them. Are not principles we apply in our homes and in business worthy of application in our relations with the church and state?

Our habit of pretending to believe what we do not, is responsible for the disagreeable fact that almost one-half our citizens are politicians in one degree or another, in one cause or another, and this results in every really useful and industrious man supporting an idler who only annoys him with sentimental and foolish doctrines.

The truth is that the leaders—made up of only one-tenth of the population: editors, public speakers, professors, preachers, and politicians of lower grade—have failed in their big undertakings, and the nine-tenths are now confronted, not only with the right, but duty, of boldly applying their practical and just philosophy.

This would not mean the abandonment of any good thing, it seems to me, but the betterment of every good thing by a simpler and easier plan. And I wonder that we fight so strenuously for principles we do not believe in, because they won't work, and so feebly for principles we *do* believe in, and know *will* work.

And if we correct this mistake, we have gone far on the right road.

Our private enterprises succeed because of enthusiasm we give enterprises we believe in; our public affairs fail because we do not believe in the methods we employ. In our private affairs we know the folly of brag; in our public affairs we attempt to put into effect the programme of every braggart, providing he will brag of education, patriotism, gallantry, religion, human brotherhood, Christianity, liberty, and kindred subjects. And in doing this we have raised rose-scented hell until finally we are able to detect the smell of brimstone.

Other Books by E. W. Howe:

“The Story of a Country Town;” new illustrated edition just issued; \$1.50 net.

“Travel Letters from New Zealand, Australia and Africa;” forty pictures; second edition; \$1.35 net.

“Daily Notes of a Trip Around the World;” illustrated; fourth edition; two volumes in a box, \$2.25 net.

“The Trip to the West Indies;” illustrated; \$1.35 net.

“Country Town Sayings;” a book of paragraphs; \$1.00 net.

“Success Easier Than Failure;” 75 cents net.

