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# ACQUISITIVE MIMICRY

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The "tricks of the trade," business "shrewdness," lying by advertisement, newspaper prevarication, the wiles of the bar, and the ruses of diplomacy are serious enough in their way, but they do not greatly hamper the honest functional people who are striving to render genuine service. What most hurts them is the tendency of the unworthy to simulate every type or trait which has won social approval in order to steal prestige from it. This taking on the popular hue is like that coloration and mimicry one finds among the lower forms of life, save that it is acquisitive rather than protective. The simulator usually aims to traffic on the prestige he filches from the simulated.

In the Middle Ages piety was the best cloak for self-seekers to assume. In his Inferno, wearing mantles of lead but gilded without, Dante places two "joyous Friars Catalano and Loderingo," founders of the Order of Knights of Saint Mary, who were called in by the Florentines in 1266 to act as mediators in private disputes but who proved to be corrupt and grasping. Satirizing the prelates, Erasmus writes:

> To work miracles is old and antiquated and not in fashion now; to instruct the people, troublesome; to interpret the Scripture, Pedantick; to pray, a

sign one has little to do; to shed tears, silly and womanish; to be poor, base; to be vanquisht, dishonourable . . . . and lastly to dye, uncouth; and to be stretcht on a Cross, infamous.

With the rise of the centralized monarchy bloomed a new type, the courtier. Thanks to Richelieu's work, Louis XIV could have proud feudal nobles as pliant ornaments of his court. La Bruyère says:

Whoever considers that the king's countenance is the courtier's supreme felicity, that he passes his life looking on it and within sight of it, will comprehend to some extent how to see God constitutes the glory and happiness of the saints.

According to Taine:

The Duc de Fronsac, every morning at seven o'clock, in winter and in summer, stationed himself, at his father's command, at the door of the small stairway leading to the chapel, solely to shake hands with Mme. De. Maintenon on her leaving for St. Cyr. "Pardon me, Madame," writes the Duc de Richelieu to her, "the great liberty I take in presuming to send you the letter which I have written to the king, begging him on my knees that he will occasionally allow me to pay my court to him at Ruel, *for I would rather die than pass two months without seeing him.*"

How a monarch who had become "the fountain of honor" was able to trade upon the passion of his ambitious subjects to share in the prestige of the feudal nobility is indicated in one of Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes:*

The King of France is the most powerful prince in Europe. He has no gold mines, like his neighbour the King of Spain—but he has greater riches than he, because he draws them from the vanity of his subjects, more inexhaustible than any mine. He has undertaken and maintained great wars, having no other funds than titles of honour for sale, and by a prodigy of human vanity and pride, his troops are paid, his places filled, and his fleets equipped.

From the courtier example there spread quickly through society a deceptive glaze of manner. In one of his sermons Bossuet declares:

Never have people lived so much on caresses, on kisses, on words chosen to bear witness to a perfect cordiality, yet if we could pierce to the bottom of all hearts, if a divine light could disclose suddenly all that conventionality and good taste, interest and fear hold so well hidden, then what a strange spectacle!

There is no reason to suppose that modern society is so corroded with hypocrisy as was the seventeenth century in France. The brushing aside of glittering parasites by the rise of the rough-and-ready, plain-dealing, functional people has brought sham into bad odor. Polite society is probably as sincere as it ever has been, while religion is now but a thin cloak for worldliness. Commercial simulation, however, waxes apace. Layer after layer of people have come to buy other people's products instead of consuming their own, so that the total purchasing power exciting the cupidity of traders is nearly equal to the entire volume of production. The possible buyers of nostrums, gold bricks, beauty recipes, "salted" mines, and town lots under water are legion. The fraud orders of our Post-Office Department in a single year bar the mails to schemes which have robbed the public of $239,000,000 within the last four years.

The rivalry to unearth new strata of customers and to sell new kinds of goods results in an ear-splitting overproduction of publicity and hence a resort to every trick of falsehood, sensationalism, suggestion, and association of ideas to impress fleeting attention. Adulterations, the misbranding of goods, the counterfeiting of trademarks, the forging of testimonials from celebrities, the manufacture of stock-exchange quotations for worthless securities, the sale of diplomas by bogus medical schools, advertisement masquerading as news dispatch or editorial—these illustrate how good repute is preyed upon. Owing to the association of the Quaker name and symbols in the public mind with integrity and just dealing, dealers are using them so unscrupulously for advertising purposes that the Quakers are now seeking legislation forbidding the use of their name as a trademark on commercial products.

A more serious, because more elusive, form of simulation is the professionalizing of something that ought not to be used for making money. There is the professional mendicant whose tone and tale far surpass in piteousness the appeal of the honest victim of misfortune. Sport is infested by the professional athlete posing as an enthusiast for physical development while greedy of prizes and purses and bent on secretly hiring himself to amateur teams and organizations whose eagerness to win has gotten the better of their

honesty. In college he passes for a student while he debases intercollegiate athletic contests with his low standards and unscrupulous methods. Nothing has so hurt real sport as the creeping in of these mercenaries among the true sportsmen.

Our courts are plagued by the presence of the professional expert witness on handwriting, poisons, or insanity. He simulates, of course, that disinterested love of truth which is rightly presumed of the bank cashier, alienist, or chemist who for a moment steps aside from his work to clear up a doubtful point in a law suit. The fact is, however, that the expert who makes a trade of furnishing testimony becomes a parasite on his own past and on the credit of his profession. To keep fees flowing in he must give testimony in favor of the side that has engaged him, at the same time guarding himself from damaging grilling by the experts and attorneys of the other side. Hence, when he has a hard case, he hides himself in a maze of technical minutiae or a cloud of big words, which can only mystify and befog the court. Experts who make a business of furnishing testimonials as to the merits of commercial wares follow the same downward path.

It is instructive to follow the recent rise and downfall of the professional muckraker. At first the exposure of the misdeeds of the high and powerful in the political, the financial, or the commercial world is dangerous, and only brave men undertake it. But in case, as sometimes happens, exposures excite interest, are eagerly read, and make money and fame for both writer and publisher, there arises the professional muckraker who aims to meet the market demand for exposure; who not only probes for a living, but who sensationalizes, spices, and misinterprets in order to dress a dish to the readers' taste. By showing only one side, twisting facts, hinting when he cannot prove, suggesting bad motives for innocent actions, and interpreting errors as crimes, he sells his wares but finally discredits the work of even the honest muckraker and brings all unauthorized exposure into doubt or contempt.

A religious body that has gained resources, credit, and power is likely to become infested by worldly clerics to whom the pulpit is an opportunity for easy living or a chance to rise. The ambitious wire-puller, without a spark of religion in his heart but adept

in its tones, phrases, and postures, schemes his way up to the miter, while the real saint works unnoticed in his parish. These shrewd self-seekers are of course strong for authority, profess orthodox beliefs, and commend themselves by their zeal in smelling out and hounding down clergymen honest enough to confess to a heresy. Until someone has devised a litmus paper for testing spirituality, wealthy and powerful churches will be liable to progressive dry rot while pure religion will be found where a learned and hard-worked clergy commands no temporal power, only a modest living, and not too much social consideration.

When charity and social work, having achieved a solid financial basis, begin to hold out the prospect of a reputable career, a change is likely to occur in the type of worker. The self-devoted still offer themselves as in the days of ill-paid and uncertain employment, but with them enter ambitious young people of greater ability and broader preparation, perhaps, but lacking the spirit of service. Conscientious and efficient they may be, but they feel little sympathy and liking for the distressed people they deal with. Try as they may to imitate the approach and manner of volunteer workers, the poor sense their coldness and are less confiding and less comforted than under the old system. While it is inevitable that social work should develop into a profession, the friends of the unfortunate who have relinquished their ministrations to paid workers may well supervise and study these workers, to the end that only the genuine may be kept and advanced. There is need of labor on unpaid boards and in voluntary associations to hold the organized services up to the mark.

Once a labor union is in smooth water with a loyal dues-paying membership willing to maintain salaried officials, the leader of its storm-and-stress period is often succeeded by the canny schemer who prefers a salary to a wage. Although willing to sell out his fellows to their political enemies—as from the Mulhall lobby investigation we know that thousands of union officials actually did—he is pat with the talk and pose of class loyalty. His first concern is by fair means or foul to keep himself in office. Thanks to his methods, labor-hall contests are sometimes worse than the politics of the lowest slum wards. While voicing roundly labor sentiments

and getting what he can for his constituents, he is too shrewd to risk his job by attacking a formidable abuse or calling a hazardous strike unless he is driven to it. His counsels of narrow self-interest chill his people to the cause of labor; so that when his ilk control a labor organization "the fight is out of it." By the fiery crusaders who rouse and organize unskilled labor, such union officials are styled "labor grafters."

The hollowness of the patrician pretense that every popular unheaval threatening privilege is the work of "irresponsible agitators" should not obscure the fact that disturbance may be followed as a trade. The man possessed of assurance, a glib tongue, a platform manner, and a taste for excitement may make a career for himself by going about stirring up discontent without in the least knowing or caring whither it will lead. Until he has met the acid test it is easy to mistake him for the unselfish champion of the wronged and the prophet of the disinherited. The workingmen dread being fooled by the windbag and are likely to withhold their full confidence from the agitator until he has proved his mettle in a time of danger and persecution.

Most insincere agitation, however, is the work of another type, the vote-seeking politician. Once power has passed from classes to masses, there springs up the professional politician, a man unembarrassed by principles, loyalty, or public spirit, whose sole and abiding concern is the gaining and keeping of office. In a way he is the modern courtier. Says Mr. Lecky:

> In the field of politics the spirit of servility and sycophancy no longer shows itself in the adulation of kings and nobles. The man who, in former ages, would have sought by Byzantine flattery to win power through the favour of an emperor or a prince, will now be found declaiming on platforms about the iniquity of privilege, extolling the matchless nobility of the masses, systematically trying to excite their passions or their jealousies, and to win them by bribes and flatteries to his side.

A thousand times the political conservatives have thus exposed him without persuading the people to return to class government. They remember that the governing class cost them quite as much as the politicians and insulted them into the bargain.

In order to maintain himself the politician must be able to drive off the field the real leaders, the men of positive character and

conviction, who have gained popular support for their ideas. This he does by impudently outbidding them at every point. His patriotism is loftier, his rhetoric more glowing, his promises more dazzling. Beside him the truth-teller who makes no mealy-mouthed professions, nor promises more than he can perform, seems halting and timid.

When a hitherto negligible class—the wage-earners, for example—gains the suffrage, or shows independence in voting, the politician professes suddenly a deep concern for its welfare. He takes to voicing its grievances and advocating measures in its program. Since the politician is able to bring to the workingmen prestige and a following, perhaps even a party, they are tempted to discard at this point the trusty working-class leaders, who have brought them thus far but can hold out to them no prospect of immediate gains, and swing to the support of the politician. It is needless to add that they either fail to get what was promised them, or, if they get it, it proves to be a sham.

When by years of labor and sacrifice a reform movement has been brought within sight of victory, some "practical" politician takes up with it, professedly as a convert, but really because he deems it a vote-getter. At this crisis its faithful friends, who nursed it through its initial unpopularity and have built it up to its present strength, are sent to the rear because they bear the taint of radicalism and the scars of defeat. Taken up by a "safe" political celebrity, the reform triumphs and goes down in history as the fruit of his statesmanship. Thus has it been with tariff reform, old-age pensions, direct democracy, and workmen's compensation. Under the two-party system scarcely any great reform is credited to those who sacrificed most for it. The glory goes to some political strategist who opposed or ignored it when it stood most in need of friends and became an eleventh-hour convert only when it could do as much for his party as his party could do for it. Such is the way of the world.

In England the old party custom of encouraging only men of fortune to stand for Parliament was defended as a means of excluding the political adventurer. After the class struggle came into politics, however, the practice had to be given up, since it left the

wage-earners entirely without representation from their own class. Non-payment of legislators has been justified on the ground that if service in the legislature involves financial sacrifice the self-seeking politicians will shun it, thus leaving the way clear for men of means and public spirit. Here again labor is put at a serious disadvantage, so that everywhere democracies have come to compensate their legislators sufficiently to cover at least their actual expenses. It is probable that the public is least plagued by political job-hunters when it allows only expenses for part-time service—like that of the legislator, the university regent, and the member of an advisory board—while for full-time service it pays well enough to attract ability.

"It is the weaker sort of politicians," says Lord Bacon, "that are the great dissemblers." Resort to the arts of popularity is, however, no proof that a public man is a professional politician. They may be forced on him by competition with the professionals. They may be his means of withstanding money and organization. The candidate of the prosperous classes does not need the eyebeam, the handshake, or the platform way of the representative of the popular cause; he has behind him the "interests" and the "machine." It is the champion of the broader public welfare or of the poor man's cause who must expose himself to the sneers of the powerful by openly paying court to his constituents.

Everything that gathers prestige will be counterfeited if it is possible to do so. This is so true that the advertisements of trashy goods give the warning, "Beware of imitators," in order that the reader may think they have prestige. Quacks hang on to the skirts of the medical profession. Shysters and "ambulance-chasers" insinuate themselves among the men at the bar. *Science* being a name to conjure with, astrologers, clairvoyants, rain-makers, magnetic healers, and "Swamis," all profess some "science." Social climbers pretend to good birth and breeding, to social experience and intimacy with the exclusive, in order to break into the charmed circle. Once a religious order has attained credit and comfort, the lazy wriggle into it in spite of all that can be done to keep them out. Like a bright river losing itself in a swamp, the Yogi movement in India lost itself among fakirs leading a life

of ease by appearing more ascetic than they really are. A new departure in art or literature has scarcely won recognition ere its originators are trodden under by the rush of charlatans and notoriety-seekers who convert the thing into a caricature of itself. Dissect symbolism, cubism, or futurism in their heyday and how small the core of sincerity!

One reason why "the new broom sweeps clean," "what is new is always fine," is that the new, lacking prestige, suffers little from the presence of impostors. The young political party, the religious order in the flush of youth, the new religious movement, the developing branch of knowledge, the literary departure not yet recognized, the experiment in philanthropy, the new-born public service, such as sanitation or forestry, is likely to be in the hands of the sincere; so that it may do better and reach higher than later after its success has attracted to it sycophants and charlatans. This is why it has so often been remarked that the fervor of faith is strongest when a religion is persecuted, not after it has won official favor; that the noblest men are to be found in a service or an agitation before there is a good living in it; and that the early leaders of a cause or a party pitched the note higher and stirred hearts more than those who headed it at its moment of triumph.

Groups and interests wear masks as well as individuals. Freedom being dear to man, selfish interests use it as a stalking-horse—leagues for "medical freedom," "industrial freedom," "free Canal," "freedom of the seas," etc. "Personal liberty" is a fig leaf for the liquor traffic. Rich men unite to fight "socialistic" measures under the name of "Liberty and Property Defense League." But their concern for *liberty* is a tittle compared with their concern for *property*. A movement for the defense of the family turns out to be a mask for brewers fighting equal suffrage. Certain nationalist societies among our foreign-born are the screen from behind which liquor dealers attack "dry" measures. A "national water power conference" may be a scheme of power companies to gain the front page for the arguments of their attorneys. Under the cloak of a "pure food" association the attorney of a baking powder company has sought legislation against rival baking powders. During the Great War a number of non-neutral movements among

hyphenated Americans have worn the guise of a peace propaganda, or a "truth" movement.

From the foregoing we may deduce:

1. The better the reputation the more eager is the simulation. Counterfeits cast no discredit on the genuine. In the words of La Rochefoucauld, "Hypocrisy is a sort of homage that vice pays to virtue."

2. From the humbler classes proceed impostors in quest of gain; from the higher classes impostors in quest of respectability, dignity, reputation, honors, or public office.

3. Frauds known and tolerated discredit the genuine, and if they are allowed to multiply will ruin whatever they have attached themselves to.

4. The unmasking and casting out of hypocrites is a temporary embarrassment to the thing simulated, but an ultimate benefit.

5. Endowments attract parasites as honey attracts flies; so that only great precautions in the way of visitation, investigation, and publicity can prevent an endowment from becoming a nest of corruption.

6. The more honest labor is despised the more will men seek to live by means of simulation. Making productive effort respectable lessens the resort to acquisitive mimicry.

7. Services that, being *spiritual*, are not subject to test should be underpaid. Clergymen, missionaries, revivalists, writers of devotional literature, poets, prophets, agitators, leaders, inspirers, and public men should receive less than their ability might command in other lines in order that these precious ministrations be not adulterated.

The showing up of the fringe of simulators that attach themselves to every reputable thing is one of those necessary but distasteful and thankless services which remind us that it is not kindness so much as militant honesty that keeps the linchpins of society from falling out. Nearly everything which has a good name stands in need of protection; hence the providing of fraud-detectors is a means of accelerating social progress.

It is not enough that the state has tardily come to lay an arresting hand on the venders of impure foods, drugs, seeds, and ferti-

lizers; to scrutinize the securities offered to the public; to fix tests for admission to certain professions, and to disbar tricky lawyers. More, much more, is needed. In every worthy calling the sheep ought to find means of isolating and branding the goats. Every profession ought to be alert to keep itself free from tares. Even now associated physicians issue an annual exposure volume about quacks and nostrums. Bureaus are forming for the interchange of the information about impostors which accumulates in the hands of charity agents. Boards of conference study to weed out the professionals from intercollegiate athletics. Although the idea of a "people's lobby" to apprise the citizens as to the voting record of their representatives was never realized, such features as the "Roll Call" and "Comment on Congress" help us to compare performance with promises. Municipal voters' leagues and legislative voters' leagues hunt the hypocrite out of politics by printing a relentless analysis of his record. In one state a single fearless writer, publishing after every legislative session a faithful history of that session, has made himself a terror to the "whited sepulchers" of politics.

The campaign against the stealers of good repute ought to be far more general and vigorous. Since tainted news is destroying the confidence of the public in the press, the honest journals ought to band together to pillory the lying newspapers. Since fearless art critics and literary critics are needed to part the real from the spurious, such critics ought to stand together against advertisers' efforts to intimidate them. The scandal of the professional expert witness might be ended by having technical testimony sought by the court—not the litigants—from some member of a panel of reputable experts recommended by their profession.

The timely recognition of merit may be as serviceable to society as the prompt elimination of the fraud. A university or a scientific institution ought to function as a testing laboratory, its degrees and appointments as certificates of purity of scholarship. To waive aside diplomas and degrees as "toys for the babyhood of science" is to overlook their value in protecting the public against mountebanks possessing the phrases and trappings of learning

but not its substance. A learned society with its honors and medals and programs may render a like service.

The public should be enabled to discriminate sharply between those who do and those who by lavish and skilful expenditure simulate achievement without having in fact achieved. By a shrewd outlay of money and attention a mere rich man may capture for himself the name of "philanthropist" which ought to be reserved for those who, like Vincent de Paul and John Howard, give themselves. By hiring able helpers and by drawing upon ample resources he may with little risk or hardship to himself gain the honors of the geographical explorer. By financing the good cause which is on the point of issuing from obscurity he may reap the reputation of reformer. By well-timed gifts and attentions to religion he may deodorize his past and acquire the aroma of sanctity.

Such stealing of plumes will not discourage those who love achievement for its own sake, but it damps the ardor of such as are fired to high emprise by the prospect of appreciation and recognition. If society allows Dives to capture the honors which ought scrupulously to be reserved for real achievers, *just because they can hope for no material reward*, it will be served less and exploited more. Consequently we ought to hail as deserving public servants the implacable critics and stern exposers who foil the schemes of the unmeriting to take the credit which belongs only to genuine achievement.

We Americans have been slow in waking up to the possibilities of formal recognition as a means of encouraging signal social service. In our eyes all honors and titles have been suspected because they are associated in our minds with privilege and hereditary transmission, neither of them essential to social recognition. But a democracy like Australia or Canada sees no harm in the knighting of citizens who have nobly served their fellows. Royalty has stimulated *its* servants by holding out decorations. Why should not the people inspire *their* servants with the prospect of recognition?

In the rational encouragement of the ambitious citizen to do his best for the common weal, Germany is a generation ahead of us.

Many a tradesman there keeps straight in the hope of some day seeing the crown over the door of his shop and calling himself *Hoflieferant.* After that he may strive for the dignity of *Kommerzienrath,* while beyond that is the high honor of *Geheimrath;* and so on. Besides this ladder of titles, any man who has done something very fine, be his station never so humble, may be honored with a signed photograph of the Kaiser, or even invited to lunch with His Majesty. In the hands of a hereditary monarch the method of graduated recognition may be perverted to dynastic and militarist designs; yet the principle is sound and it ought to be as feasible for the people to capture and keep the power of recognition as it has been feasible for them to capture and keep the power of the purse.

Our neglect of public ante-mortem recognition has obliged the man of high desert to vociferate his claims or else remain in obscurity with no other reward than the consciousness of duty performed. If in every walk of life notable achievement were promptly singled out and formally recognized, our eardrums would not ache as now with the self-recommendation of impostors. We need more responsible agencies with the right to seek out and set a hallmark on sterling merit. It is not too much for society through governor, mayor, state university, library trustees, school board, or other representative to give an early and a right direction to public esteem. Let a certificate, diploma, medal, label, portrait, or commemorative naming of street or park or public building set the man of extraordinary merit apart, *while he is still alive,* from the pursuing horde of impudent pretenders.