



Mr. Ford's Page

IT IS being sent out from Washington that the government is through interfering with business, and the announcement will be received according to the point of view of the individual. Some will hail it as a release from past restrictions and as a repudiation of a certain policy; others will regard it as a backward step and as a partial abandonment of the principle that property must always be held subservient to the people.

Every man must discuss this according to his experience and no single point of view will include all the truth. We may set it down as fundamental, however, that the intention of government has not been to restrict business but only the abuses which have crept into business.

This restriction has itself been subject to abuse at times. That is those who have been given the power of restriction have sometimes been under the control of unscrupulous interests who were quite willing that restrictions should be imposed upon their competitors, thus creating a disadvantage. But on the whole this business of restriction has not worked. Certain specific abuses may have been corrected, but the mainspring of all business abuses has not been touched, nor can it be by mere enactment of statutes.

The first revolt of the American mind against the tendency toward swollen irresponsibility in business was shown in the anti-trust agitation in Roosevelt days. Business was then forming in large aggregations and, as in all new developments, there was a tendency toward thinking itself the be-all and end-all of national life. There had just been a very severe industrial depression, and the vision of smoking factory stacks and "the full dinner pail" had played their part in an industrial stimulus and growth without parallel.

Life, however, cannot grow disproportionately on one side without causing inconvenience, and presently a protest came. It was but natural. And, just as before, when statesmen set their energies to making business lively, so now statesmen bent to the task of making business behave. Thus was inaugurated the era of control. There was a great deal of so-called "trust-busting," which had the effect principally of changing the legal form of the trusts and nothing more. There were investigations and systems of inspection, and with it all a few genuine reforms like the abolition of the railroad rebate.

Now, about all we have gained out of the experience is this: human nature runs wild if it gets the chance, and the tricks it will play cannot always be understood from the surface but must be probed, and, moreover, it can evade practically every law set up for its control.

So far from this being an argument against what the government tried to do, it is an argument for its being done in a more effective way.

The misdemeanors of business have been bad for business; if not always bad for the profits, then bad for the reputation of business. All the annoyance of the restrictions put on by government did not more than compensate, if indeed they did compensate, for the abuses which business practiced. That there was wrong-doing, no one doubts. That some of this wrong-doing was of the most sordid and nasty character is all too true. We despise the man who manipulates the scales in selling a pound of food; what contempt is sufficient for a corporation which systematically cheats on weights, using therefor a system whose intricacy and costliness and conspiratorial teamwork was worthy of a better cause!

None of these things is found out, however, unless there are agencies for finding them out. That is where the government has done its best work—in studying business, and during the progress of the study detecting the rotten spots. The Federal Trade Commission, for example, found out a great number of rotten spots. The bribing of purchasing agents, the use of deceptive advertis-

ing, the immoral and condemnable adulteration of commodities—these are rotten spots which require disinterested outsiders to detect and expose. People "on the inside" are sometimes too heavily interested to embark on the work of self-correction.

And yet, until this entire corrective work proceeds from the inside, it cannot be accomplished as it ought to be. Not legal but moral compulsion is the best law.

Business as a life-profession should have its recognized professional ethics, to violate which declassifies a man. The motive power which would make such an ethical system vital, is the idea of Business as a field of human service, just as Education or Medicine are.

That idea is existent but it is not regnant. People know it as an ideal but not as a reality. There is, moreover, a considerable doubt expressed at times whether business can be run on that principle.

Malpractice in Business cannot become any more substantial or lasting than malpractice in any other field. There is no question about that. Business always goes on, but "businesses" are falling by the wayside every day. It is not only true to say that good principle is compatible with business (and that is expressing it as if business were merely moving over to make room for good principle because, forsooth, good principle has influential friends!), but it is also true that bad principle is absolutely incompatible with good business. A great many people have tried it, and though they may have been "successful" in scooping in the profits for a time, they have not succeeded in business.

Some men stay in business just as the burglar does; he may remain a burglar but he has to move around a lot. Some business men pursue the same business methods, but not long in the same locality nor in the same line.

Business must be controlled from the inside, and the governing principle must be a mingled knowledge of social needs and moral laws, if it is ever to be properly controlled at all.

What Business needs is a little of the professional spirit. The professional spirit is one that seeks professional integrity, from pride, not from compulsion. The professional spirit detects its own violations and penalizes them.

Take a hospital, for example: you don't need a policeman to keep it clean. It is part of the hospital's work to be clean, because absolute cleanliness helps to provide the atmosphere which has most healing and least harm in it. Hospitals keep themselves clean because

cleanliness is not only their pride but their business. A dirty hospital simply is not a hospital, and no amount of make-believe can render it a hospital.

Business will one day become clean on the same basis. It will become clean as a preventive of commercial septic conditions. A machine that stops every little while is an imperfect machine, and its imperfection is within itself. A body that falls sick every little while is a diseased body, and its disease is within itself. So with business. Its faults, many of them purely the faults of the mechanism of business, but many also the faults of the moral constitution of business, clog its progress and make it sick every little while.

Now, you can inspect weights and measures, but not motives. You can examine income reports, but not the managers. That is, the rights and wrongs of business begin much further back than any legal process can go; indeed, legal processes are effective only as they produce alarm, fear or shame further in where the soul of the business lives.

Some day the ethics of business will be universally recognized, and in that day Business will be seen to be the oldest and most useful of all the professions.

BUSINESS is the oldest of professions, and if it had a code of ethics it would be the most useful profession practiced by man. It serves humanity at more points and is more vitally connected with all human interests, than any other. If a man is honest elsewhere, but not in business, what does his honesty count for? If a man is capable elsewhere, but a dunce in business, how incapable he really is! Business is a queen of the sciences, employing and encouraging them all; a field for the employment of all virtues that man can exhibit; the one profession capable of a dignified and expansive oversight and patronage of all the others. Where it falls beneath this estimate, the lack is in ethical pride. Business can best be controlled from the motive within.