

# Twelve Causes of Dishonesty

Henry Ward Beecher

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# Twelve Causes

**of**  
**Dishonesty**

**By Rev. Henry  
Ward  
Beecher**

**Philadelphia  
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## TWELVE CAUSES OF DISHONESTY

Only extraordinary circumstances can give the appearance of dishonesty to an honest man. Usually, not to *seem* honest, is not to *be* so. The quality must not be doubtful like twilight, lingering between night and day and taking hues from both; it must be day-light, clear, and effulgent. This is the doctrine of the Bible: *Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, BUT ALSO IN THE SIGHT OF MEN.* In general it may be said that no one has honesty without dross, until he has honesty without suspicion.

We are passing through times upon which the seeds of dishonesty have been sown broadcast, and they have brought forth a hundred-fold. These times will pass away; but like ones will come again. As physicians study the causes and record the phenomena of plagues and pestilences, to draw from them an antidote against their recurrence, so should we leave to another generation a history of moral plagues, as the best antidote to their recurring malignity.

Upon a land,—capacious beyond measure, whose prodigal soil rewards labor with an unharvestable abundance of exuberant fruits, occupied by a people signalized by enterprise and industry—there came a summer of prosperity which lingered so long and shone so brightly, that men forgot that winter could ever come. Each day grew brighter. No reins were put upon the imagination. Its dreams passed for realities. Even sober men, touched with wildness, seemed to expect a realization of oriental tales. Upon this bright day came sudden frosts, storms, and blight. Men awoke from gorgeous dreams in the midst of desolation. The harvests of years were swept away in a day. The strongest firms were rent as easily as the oak by lightning. Speculating companies were dispersed as seared leaves from a tree in autumn. Merchants were ruined by thousands; clerks turned adrift by ten thousands. Mechanics were left in idleness. Farmers sighed over flocks and wheat as useless as the stones and dirt. The wide sea of commerce was stagnant; upon the realm of Industry settled down a sullen lethargy.

Out of this reverse swarmed an unnumbered host of dishonest men, like vermin from a carcass. Banks were exploded,—or robbed,—or fleeced by astounding forgeries. Mighty companies, without cohesion, went to pieces, and hordes of wretches snatched up every bale that came ashore. Cities were ransacked by troops of villains. The unparalleled frauds, which sprung like mines on every

hand, set every man to trembling lest the next explosion should be under his own feet. Fidelity seemed to have forsaken men. Many that had earned a reputation for sterling honesty were cast so suddenly headlong into wickedness, that man shrank from man. Suspicion overgrew confidence, and the heart bristled with the nettles and thorns of fear and jealousy. Then had almost come to pass the divine delineation of ancient wickedness: *The good man is perished out of the earth: and there is none upright among men: they all lie in wait for blood; they hunt every man his brother with a net. That they may do evil with both hands earnestly, the prince and the judge ask for a reward: and the great man uttereth his mischievous desire; so they wrap it up. The best of them is a brier; the most upright is sharper than a thorn hedge.* The world looked upon a continent of inexhaustible fertility, (whose harvest had glutted the markets, and rotted in disuse,) filled with lamentation, and its inhabitants wandering like bereaved citizens among the ruins of an earthquake, mourning for children, for houses crushed, and property buried forever.

That no measure might be put to the calamity, the Church of God, which rises a stately tower of refuge to desponding men, seemed now to have lost its power of protection. When the solemn voice of Religion should have gone over the land, as the call of God to guilty man to seek in him their strength; in this time when Religion should have restored sight to the blind, made the lame to walk, and bound up the broken-hearted, she was herself mourning in sackcloth. Out of her courts came the noise of warring sects; some contending against others with bitter warfare; and some, possessed of a demon, wallowed upon the ground foaming and rending themselves. In a time of panic, and disaster, and distress, and crime, the fountain which should have been for the healing of men, cast up its sediments, and gave out a bitter stream of pollution.

In every age, an universal pestilence has hushed the clamor of contention, and cooled the heats of parties; but the greatness of our national calamity seemed only to enkindle the fury of political parties. Contentions never ran with such deep streams and impetuous currents, as amidst the ruin of our industry and prosperity. States were greater debtors to foreign nations, than their citizens were to each other. Both states and citizens shrunk back from their debts, and yet more dishonestly from the taxes necessary to discharge them. The General Government did not escape, but lay becalmed, or pursued its course, like a ship, at every furlong touching the rocks, or beating against the sands. The Capitol trembled with the first waves of a question which is yet to shake the whole land. New questions of exciting qualities perplexed the realm of legislation, and of



morals. To all this must be added a manifest decline of family government; an increase of the ratio of popular ignorance; a decrease of reverence for law, and an effeminate administration of it. Popular tumults have been as frequent as freshets in our rivers; and like them, have swept over the land with desolation, and left their filthy slime in the highest places:—upon the press;—upon the legislature;—in the halls of our courts;—and even upon the sacred bench of Justice. If unsettled times foster dishonesty, it should have flourished among us. And it has.

Our nation must expect a periodical return of such convulsions; but experience should steadily curtail their ravages, and remedy their immoral tendencies. Young men have before them lessons of manifold wisdom taught by the severest of masters—experience. They should be studied; and that they may be, I shall, from this general survey, turn to a specific enumeration of the causes of dishonesty.

1. Some men find in their bosom from the first, a vehement inclination to dishonest ways. Knavish propensities are inherent: born with the child and transmissible from parent to son. The children of a sturdy thief, if taken from him at birth and reared by honest men, would, doubtless, have to contend against a strongly dishonest inclination. Foundlings and orphans under public charitable charge, are more apt to become vicious than other children. They are usually born of low and vicious parents, and inherit their parents' propensities. Only the most thorough moral training can overrule this innate depravity.

2. A child naturally fair-minded, may become dishonest by parental example. He is early taught to be sharp in bargains, and vigilant for every advantage. Little is said about honesty, and much upon shrewd traffic. A dexterous trick, becomes a family anecdote; visitors are regaled with the boy's precocious keenness. Hearing the praise of his exploits, he studies craft, and seeks parental admiration by adroit knaveries. He is taught, for his safety, that he must not range beyond the law: that would be unprofitable. He calculates his morality thus: *Legal honesty is the best policy*,—dishonesty, then, is a bad bargain—and therefore wrong—everything is wrong which is unthrifty. Whatever profit breaks no legal statute—though it is gained by falsehood, by unfairness, by gloss; through dishonor, unkindness, and an unscrupulous conscience—he considers fair, and says: *The law allows it*. Men may spend a long life without an indictable action, and without an honest one. No law can reach the insidious ways of subtle craft. The law allows, and religion forbids men, to profit by others' misfortunes, to prowl for prey among the ignorant, to over-reach the simple, to suck the last life-

drops from the bleeding; to hover over men as a vulture over herds, swooping down upon the weak, the straggling, and the weary. The infernal craft of cunning men, turns the law itself to piracy, and works outrageous fraud in the hall of Courts, by the decision of judges, and under the seal of Justice.

3. Dishonesty is learned from one's employers. The boy of honest parents and honestly bred, goes to a trade, or a store, where the employer practises *legal* frauds. The plain honesty of the boy excites roars of laughter among the better taught clerks. The master tells them that such blundering truthfulness must be pitied; the boy evidently has been neglected, and is not to be ridiculed for what he could not help. At first, it verily pains the youth's scruples, and tinges his face to frame a deliberate dishonesty, to finish, and to polish it. His tongue stammers at a lie; but the example of a rich master, the jeers and gibes of shopmates, with gradual practice, cure all this. He becomes adroit in fleecing customers for his master's sake, and equally dexterous in fleecing his master for his own sake.

4. EXTRAVAGANCE is a prolific source of dishonesty. Extravagance,—which is foolish expense, or expense disproportionate to one's means,—may be found in all grades of society; but it is chiefly apparent among the rich, those aspiring to wealth, and those wishing to be *thought* affluent. Many a young man cheats his business, by transferring his means to theatres, race-courses, expensive parties, and to the nameless and numberless projects of pleasure. The enterprise of others is baffled by the extravagance of their family; for few men can make as much in a year as an extravagant woman can carry on her back in one winter. Some are ambitious of fashionable society, and will gratify their vanity at any expense. This disproportion between means and expense soon brings on a crisis. The victim is straitened for money; without it he must abandon his rank; for fashionable society remorselessly rejects all butterflies which have lost their brilliant colors. Which shall he choose, honesty and mortifying exclusion, or gaiety purchased by dishonesty? The severity of this choice sometimes sobers the intoxicated brain; and a young man shrinks from the gulf, appalled at the darkness of dishonesty. But to excessive vanity, high-life with or without fraud, is Paradise; and any other life Purgatory. Here many resort to dishonesty without a scruple. It is at this point that public sentiment half sustains dishonesty. It scourges the thief of Necessity, and pities the thief of Fashion.

The struggle with others is on the very ground of honor. A wife led from affluence to frigid penury and neglect; from leisure and luxury to toil and want; daughters, once courted as rich, to be disesteemed when poor,—this is the gloomy prospect, seen through a magic haze of despondency. Honor, love and

generosity, strangely bewitched, plead for dishonesty as the only alternative to such suffering. But go, young man, to your wife; tell her the alternative; if she is worthy of you, she will face your poverty with a courage which shall shame your fears, and lead you into its wilderness and through it, all unshrinking. Many there be who went weeping into this desert, and ere long, having found in it the fountains of the purest peace, have thanked God for the pleasures of poverty. But if your wife unmans your resolution, imploring dishonor rather than penury, may God pity and help you! You dwell with a sorceress, and few can resist her wiles.

5. DEBT is an inexhaustible fountain of Dishonesty. The Royal Preacher tells us: *The borrower is servant to the lender.* Debt is a rigorous servitude. The debtor learns the cunning tricks, delays, concealments, and frauds, by which slaves evade or cheat their master. He is tempted to make ambiguous statements; pledges, with secret passages of escape; contracts, with fraudulent constructions; lying excuses, and more mendacious promises. He is tempted to elude responsibility; to delay settlements; to prevaricate upon the terms; to resist equity, and devise specious fraud. When the eager creditor would restrain such vagrancy by law, the debtor then thinks himself released from moral obligation, and brought to a legal game, in which it is lawful for the best player to win. He disputes true accounts; he studies subterfuges; extorts provocative delays; and harbors in every nook, and corner, and passage, of the law's labyrinth. At length the measure is filled up, and the malignant power of debt is known. It has opened in the heart every fountain of iniquity; it has besoiled the conscience; it has tarnished the honor; it has made the man a deliberate student of knavery; a systematic practitioner of fraud; it has dragged him through all the sewers of petty passions,—anger, hate, revenge, malicious folly, or malignant shame. When a debtor is beaten at every point, and the law will put her screws upon him, there is no depth in the gulf of dishonesty into which he will not boldly plunge. Some men put their property to the flames, assassinate the detested creditor, and end the frantic tragedy by suicide, or the gallows. Others, in view of the catastrophe, have converted all property to cash, and concealed it. The law's utmost skill, and the creditor's fury, are alike powerless now,—the tree is green and thrifty; its roots drawing a copious supply from some hidden fountain.

Craft has another harbor of resort for the piratical crew of dishonesty; viz.: *putting the property out of the law's reach by a fraudulent conveyance.* Whoever runs in debt, and consumes the equivalent of his indebtedness; whoever is fairly liable to damage for broken contracts; whoever by folly, has incurred debts and lost the benefit of his outlay; whoever is legally obliged to pay for his malice or

carelessness; whoever by infidelity to public trusts has made his property a just remuneration for his defaults;—whoever of all these, or whoever, under any circumstances, puts out of his hands property, morally or legally due to creditors, is A DISHONEST MAN. The crazy excuses which men render to their consciences, are only such as every villain makes, who is unwilling to look upon the black face of his crimes.

He who will receive a conveyance of property, knowing it to be illusive and fraudulent, is as wicked as the principal; and as much meaner, as the tool and subordinate of villany is meaner than the master who uses him.

If a church, knowing all these facts, or wilfully ignorant of them, allows a member to nestle in the security of the sanctuary; then the act of this robber, and the connivance of the church, are but the two parts of one crime.

6. BANKRUPTCY, although a branch of debt, deserves a separate mention. It sometimes crushes a man's spirit, and sometimes exasperates it. The poignancy of the evil depends much upon the disposition of the creditors; and as much upon the disposition of the victim. Should *they* act with the lenity of Christian men, and *he* with manly honesty, promptly rendering up whatever satisfaction of debt he has,—he may visit the lowest places of human adversity, and find there the light of good men's esteem, the support of conscience, and the sustenance of religion.

A bankrupt may fall into the hands of men whose tender-mercies are cruel; or his dishonest equivocations may exasperate their temper and provoke every thorn and brier of the law. When men's passions are let loose, especially their avarice whetted by real or imaginary wrong; when there is a rivalry among creditors, lest any one should feast upon the victim more than his share; and they all rush upon him like wolves upon a wounded deer, dragging him down, ripping him open, breast and flank, plunging deep their bloody muzzles to reach the heart and taste blood at the very fountain;—is it strange that resistance is desperate and unscrupulous? At length the sufferer drags his mutilated carcass aside, every nerve and muscle wrung with pain, and his whole body an instrument of agony. He curses the whole inhuman crew with envenomed imprecations; and thenceforth, a brooding misanthrope, he pays back to society, by studied villainies, the legal wrongs which the relentless justice of a few, or his own knavery, have brought upon him.

7. There is a circle of moral dishonesties practised because the LAW allows them.

The very anxiety of law to reach the devices of cunning, so perplexes its statutes with exceptions, limitations, and supplements, that like a castle gradually enlarged for centuries, it has its crevices, dark corners, secret holes and winding passages—an endless harbor for rats and vermin, where no trap can catch them. We are villanously infested with legal rats and rascals, who are able to commit the most flagrant dishonesties with impunity. They can do all of wrong which is profitable, without that part which is actionable. The very ingenuity of these miscreants excites such admiration of their skill, that their life is gilded with a specious respectability. Men profess little esteem for blunt, necessitous thieves, who rob and run away; but for a gentleman who can break the whole of God's law so adroitly, as to leave man's law unbroken; who can indulge in such conservative stealing that his fellow-men award him a rank among honest men for the excessive skill of his dishonesty—for such a one, I fear, there is almost universal sympathy.

8. POLITICAL DISHONESTY, breeds dishonesty of every kind. It is possible for good men to permit single sins to co-exist with general integrity, where the evil is indulged through ignorance. Once, undoubted Christians were slave-traders. They might be, while unenlightened; but not in our times. A state of mind which will *intend* one fraud, will, upon occasions, intend a thousand. He that upon one emergency will lie, will be supplied with emergencies. He that will perjure himself to save a friend, will do it, in a desperate juncture, to save himself. The highest Wisdom has informed us that *He that is unjust in the least, is unjust also in much*. Circumstances may withdraw a politician from temptation to any but political dishonesty; but under temptation, a dishonest politician would be a dishonest cashier,—would be dishonest anywhere,—in anything. The fury which destroys an opponent's character, would stop at nothing, if barriers were thrown down. That which is true of the leaders in politics, is true of subordinates. Political dishonesty in voters runs into general dishonesty, as the rotten speck taints the whole apple. A community whose politics are conducted by a perpetual breach of honesty on both sides, will be tainted by immorality throughout. Men will play the same game in their private affairs, which they have learned to play in public matters. The guile, the crafty vigilance, the dishonest advantage, the cunning sharpness;—the tricks and traps and sly evasions; the equivocal promises, and unequivocal neglect of them, which characterize political action, will equally characterize private action. The mind has no kitchen to do its dirty work in, while the parlor remains clean. Dishonesty is an atmosphere; if it comes into one apartment, it penetrates into every one. Whoever will lie in politics, will lie in traffic. Whoever will slander in politics, will slander in personal squabbles.

A professor of religion who is a dishonest politician, is a dishonest Christian. His creed is a perpetual index of his hypocrisy.

The genius of our government directs the attention of every citizen to politics. Its spirit reaches the uttermost bound of society, and pervades the whole mass. If its channels are slimy with corruption, what limit can be set to its malign influence? The turbulence of elections, the virulence of the press, the desperation of bad men, the hopelessness of efforts which are not cunning, but only honest, have driven many conscientious men from any concern with politics. This is suicidal. Thus the tempest will grow blacker and fiercer. Our youth will be caught up in its whirling bosom and dashed to pieces, and its hail will break down every green thing. At God's house the cure should begin. Let the hand of discipline smite the leprous lips which shall utter the profane heresy: *All is fair in politics*. If any hoary professor, drunk with the mingled wine of excitement, shall tell our youth, that a Christian man may act in politics by any other rule of morality than that of the Bible; and that wickedness performed for a party, is not as abominable, as if done for a man; or that any necessity justifies or palliates dishonesty in word or deed,—let such a one go out of the camp, and his pestilent breath no longer spread contagion among our youth. No man who loves his country, should shrink from her side when she groans with raging distempers. Let every Christian man stand in his place; rebuke every dishonest practice; scorn a political as well as a personal lie; and refuse with indignation to be insulted by the solicitation of an immoral man. Let good men of all parties require honesty, integrity, veracity, and morality in politics, and there, as powerfully as anywhere else, the requisitions of public sentiment will ultimately be felt.

9. A corrupt PUBLIC SENTIMENT produces dishonesty. A public sentiment, in which dishonesty is not disgraceful; in which bad men are respectable, are trusted, are honored, are exalted—is a curse to the young. The fever of speculation, the universal derangement of business, the growing laxness of morals, is, to an alarming extent, introducing such a state of things. Men of notorious immorality, whose dishonesty is flagrant, whose private habits would disgrace the ditch, are powerful and popular. I have seen a man stained with every sin, except those which required courage; into whose head I do not think a pure thought has entered for forty years; in whose heart an honorable feeling would droop for very loneliness;—in evil he was ripe and rotten; hoary and depraved in deed, in word, in his present life and in all his past; evil when by himself, and viler among men; corrupting to the young;—to domestic fidelity, a recreant; to

common honor, a traitor; to honesty, an outlaw; to religion, a hypocrite;—base in all that is worthy of man, and accomplished in whatever is disgraceful; and yet this wretch could go where he would; enter good men's dwellings, and purloin their votes. Men would curse him, yet obey him; hate him and assist him; warn their sons against him, and lead them to the polls for him. A public sentiment which produces ignominious knaves, cannot breed honest men.

Any calamity, civil or commercial, which checks the administration of justice between man and man, is ruinous to honesty. The violent fluctuations of business cover the ground with rubbish over which men stumble; and fill the air with dust, in which all the shapes of honesty appear distorted. Men are thrown upon unusual expedients; dishonesties are unobserved; those who have been reckless and profuse, stave off the legitimate fruits of their folly by desperate shifts. We have not yet emerged from a period, in which debts were insecure; the debtor legally protected against the rights of the creditor; taxes laid, not by the requirements of justice, but for political effect; and lowered to a dishonest insufficiency; and when thus diminished, not collected; the citizens resisting their own officers; officers resigning at the bidding of the electors; the laws of property paralyzed; bankrupt laws built up; and stay-laws unconstitutionally enacted, upon which the courts look with aversion, yet fear to deny them, lest the wildness of popular opinion should roll back disdainfully upon the bench, to despoil its dignity, and prostrate its power. General suffering has made us tolerant of general dishonesty; and the gloom of our commercial disaster threatens to become the pall of our morals.

If the shocking stupidity of the public mind to atrocious dishonesties is not aroused; if good men do not bestir themselves to drag the young from this foul sorcery; if the relaxed bands of honesty are not tightened, and conscience intoned to a severer morality, our night is at hand,—our midnight not far off. Woe to that guilty people who sit down upon broken laws, and wealth saved by injustice! Woe to a generation fed upon the bread of fraud, whose children's inheritance shall be a perpetual memento of their fathers' unrighteousness; to whom dishonesty shall be made pleasant by association with the revered memories of father, brother, and friend!

But when a whole people, united by a common disregard of justice, conspire to defraud public creditors; and States vie with States in an infamous repudiation of just debts, by open or sinister methods; and nations exert their sovereignty to protect and dignify the knavery of a Commonwealth; then the confusion of domestic affairs has bred a fiend, before whose flight honor fades away, and

under whose feet the sanctity of truth and the religion of solemn compacts are stamped down and ground into the dirt. Need we ask the causes of growing dishonesty among the young, and the increasing untrustworthiness of all agents, when States are seen clothed with the panoply of dishonesty, and nations put on fraud for their garments?

Absconding agents, swindling schemes, and defalcations, occurring in such melancholy abundance, have at length ceased to be wonders, and rank with the common accidents of fire and flood. The budget of each week is incomplete without its mob and runaway cashier—its duel and defaulter; and as waves which roll to the shore are lost in those which follow on, so the villanies of each week obliterate the record of the last.

The mania of dishonesty cannot arise from local causes; it is the result of disease in the whole community; an eruption betokening foulness of the blood; blotches symptomatic of a disordered system.

10. FINANCIAL AGENTS are especially liable to the temptations of Dishonesty. Safe merchants, and visionary schemers; sagacious adventurers, and rash speculators; frugal beginners, and retired millionaires, are constantly around them. Every word, every act, every entry, every letter, suggests only wealth—its germ, its bud, its blossom, its golden harvest. Its brilliance dazzles the sight; its seductions stir the appetites; its power fires the ambition, and the soul concentrates its energies to obtain wealth, as life's highest and only joy.

Besides the influence of such associations, direct dealing in *money* as a commodity, has a peculiar effect upon the heart. There is no property between it and the mind;—no medium to mellow its light. The mind is diverted and refreshed by no thoughts upon the quality of soils; the durability of structures; the advantages of sites; the beauty of fabrics; it is not invigorated by the necessity of labor and ingenuity which the mechanic feels; by the invention of the artisan, or the taste of the artist. The whole attention falls directly upon naked Money. The hourly sight of it whets the appetite, and sharpens it to avarice. Thus, with an intense regard of riches, steals in also the miser's relish of coin—that insatiate gazing and fondling, by which seductive metal wins to itself all the blandishments of love.

Those who *mean* to be rich, often begin by imitating the expensive courses of those who *are* rich. They are also tempted to venture, before they have means of their own, in brilliant speculations. How can a young cashier pay the drafts of his



illicit pleasures, or procure the seed, for the harvest of speculation, out of his narrow salary? Here first begins to work the leaven of death. The mind wanders in dreams of gain; it broods over projects of unlawful riches; stealthily at first, and then with less reserve; at last it boldly meditates the possibility of being dishonest and *safe*. When a man can seriously reflect upon dishonesty as a possible and profitable thing, he is already deeply dishonest. To a mind so tainted, will flock stories of consummate craft, of effective knavery, of fraud covered by its brilliant success. At times, the mind shrinks from its own thoughts, and trembles to look down the giddy cliff on whose edge they poise, or over which they fling themselves like sporting sea-birds. But these imaginations will not be driven from the heart where they have once nested. They haunt a man's business, visit him in dreams, and vampire-like, fan the slumbers of the victim whom they will destroy. In some feverish hour, vibrating between conscience and avarice, the man staggers to a compromise. To satisfy his conscience he refuses to *steal*; and to gratify his avarice, he *borrow*s the funds;—not openly—not of owners—not of men: but of the till—the safe—the vault!

He resolves to restore the money before discovery can ensue, and pocket the profits. Meanwhile, false entries are made, perjured oaths are sworn, forged papers are filed. His expenses grow profuse, and men wonder from what fountain so copious a stream can flow.

Let us stop here to survey his condition. He flourishes, is called prosperous, thinks himself safe. Is he safe, or honest? He has stolen, and embarked the amount upon a sea over which wander perpetual storms; where wreck is the common fate, and escape the accident; and now all his chance for the semblance of honesty, is staked upon the return of his embezzlements from among the sands, the rocks and currents, the winds and waves, and darkness, of tumultuous speculation. At length dawns the day of discovery. His guilty dreams have long foretokened it. As he confronts the disgrace almost face to face, how changed is the hideous aspect of his deed, from that fair face of promise with which it tempted him! Conscience, and honor, and plain honesty, which left him when they could not restrain, now come back to sharpen his anguish. Overawed by the prospect of open shame, of his wife's disgrace, and his children's beggary, he cowers down, and slinks out of life a frantic suicide.

Some there be, however, less supple to shame. They meet their fate with cool impudence; defy their employers; brave the court, and too often with success. The delusion of the public mind, or the confusion of affairs is such, that, while petty culprits are tumbled into prison, a cool, calculating and immense scoundrel

is pitied, dandled and nursed by a sympathizing community. In the broad road slanting to the rogue's retreat, are seen the officer of the bank, the agent of the state, the officer of the church, in indiscriminate haste, outrunning a lazy justice, and bearing off the gains of astounding frauds. Avarice and pleasure seem to have dissolved the conscience. *It is a day of trouble and of perplexity from the Lord.* We tremble to think that our children must leave the covert of the family, and go out upon that dark and yeasty sea, from whose wrath so many wrecks are cast up at our feet. Of one thing I am certain; if the church of Christ is silent to such deeds, and makes her altar a refuge to such dishonesty, the day is coming when she shall have no altar, the light shall go out from her candlestick, her walls shall be desolate, and the fox look out at her windows.

11. EXECUTIVE CLEMENCY, by its frequency, has been a temptation to Dishonesty. Who will fear to be a culprit when a legal sentence is the argument of pity, and the prelude of pardon? What can the community expect but growing dishonesty, when juries connive at acquittals, and judges condemn only to petition a pardon; when honest men and officers fly before a mob; when jails are besieged and threatened, if felons are not relinquished; when the Executive, consulting the spirit of the community, receives the demands of the mob, and humbly complies, throwing down the fences of the law, that base rioters may walk unimpeded, to their work of vengeance, or unjust mercy? A sickly sentimentality too often enervates the administration of justice; and the pardoning power becomes the master-key to let out unwashed, unrepentant criminals. They have fleeced us, robbed us, and are ulcerous sores to the body politic; yet our heart turns to water over their merited punishment. A fine young fellow, by accident, writes another's name for his own; by a mistake equally unfortunate, he presents it at the bank; innocently draws out the large amount; generously spends a part, and absent-mindedly hides the rest. Hard-hearted wretches there are, who would punish him for this! Young men, admiring the neatness of the affair, pity his misfortune, and curse a stupid jury that knew no better than to send to a penitentiary, him, whose skill deserved a cashiership. He goes to his cell, the pity of a whole metropolis. Bulletins from Sing-Sing inform us daily what Edwards<sup>[1]</sup> is doing, as if he were Napoleon at St. Helena. At length pardoned, he will go forth again to a renowned liberty!

If there be one way quicker than another, by which the Executive shall assist crime, and our laws foster it, it is that course which assures every dishonest man, that it is easy to defraud, easy to avoid arrest, easy to escape punishment, and easiest of all to obtain a pardon.

12. COMMERCIAL SPECULATIONS are prolific of Dishonesty. Speculation is the risking of capital in enterprises greater than we can control, or in enterprises whose elements are not at all calculable. All calculations of the future are uncertain; but those which are based upon long experience approximate certainty, while those which are drawn by sagacity from probable events, are notoriously unsafe. Unless, however, some venture, we shall forever tread an old and dull path; therefore enterprise is allowed to pioneer new ways. The safe enterpriser explores cautiously, ventures at first a little, and increases the venture with the ratio of experience. A speculator looks out upon the new region, as upon a far-away landscape, whose features are softened to beauty by distance; upon a *hope*, he stakes that, which, if it wins, will make him; and if it loses, will ruin him. When the alternatives are victory, or utter destruction, a battle may, sometimes, still be necessary. But commerce has no such alternatives; only speculation proceeds upon them.

If the capital is borrowed, it is as dishonest, upon such ventures, to risk, as to lose it. Should a man borrow a noble steed and ride among incitements which he knew would rouse up his fiery spirit to an uncontrollable height, and borne away with wild speed, be plunged over a precipice, his destruction might excite our pity, but could not alter our opinion of his dishonesty. He borrowed property, and endangered it where he knew that it would be uncontrollable.

If the capital be one's own, it can scarcely be risked and lost, without the ruin of other men. No man could blow up his store in a compact street, and destroy only his own. Men of business are, like threads of a fabric, woven together, and subject, to a great extent, to a common fate of prosperity or adversity. I have no right to cut off my hand; I defraud myself, my family, the community, and God; for all these have an interest in that hand. Neither has a man the right to throw away his property. He defrauds himself, his family, the community in which he dwells; for all these have an interest in that property. If waste is dishonesty, then every risk, in proportion as it approaches it, is dishonest. To venture, without that foresight which experience gives, is wrong; and if we cannot foresee, then we must not venture.

Scheming speculation demoralizes honesty, and almost necessitates dishonesty. He who puts his own interests to rash ventures, will scarcely do better for others. The Speculator regards the weightiest affair as only a splendid game. Indeed, a Speculator on the exchange, and a Gambler at his table, follow one vocation, only with different instruments. One employs cards or dice, the other property. The one can no more foresee the result of his schemes, than the other what spots

will come up on his dice; the calculations of both are only the chances of luck. Both burn with unhealthy excitement; both are avaricious of gains, but careless of what they win; both depend more upon fortune than skill; they have a common distaste for labor; with each, right and wrong are only the accidents of a game; neither would scruple in any hour to set his whole being on the edge of ruin, and going over, to pull down, if possible, a hundred others.

The wreck of such men leaves them with a drunkard's appetite, and a fiend's desperation. The revulsion from extravagant hopes, to a certainty of midnight darkness; the sensations of poverty, to him who was in fancy just stepping upon a princely estate; the humiliation of gleaning for cents, where he has been profuse of dollars; the chagrin of seeing old competitors now above him, grinning down upon his poverty a malignant triumph; the pity of pitiful men, and the neglect of such as should have been his friends,—and who were, while the sunshine lay upon his path,—all these things, like so many strong winds, sweep across the soul so that it cannot rest in the cheerless tranquility of honesty, but *casts up mire and dirt*. How stately the balloon rises and sails over continents, as over petty landscapes! The slightest slit in its frail covering sends it tumbling down, swaying widely, whirling and pitching hither and thither, until it plunges into some dark glen, out of the path of honest men, and too shattered to tempt even a robber. So have we seen a thousand men pitched down; so now, in a thousand places may their wrecks be seen. But still other balloons are framing, and the air is full of victim-venturers.

If our young men are introduced to life with distaste for safe ways, because the sure profits are slow; if the opinion becomes prevalent that all business is great, only as it tends to the uncertain, the extravagant, and the romantic; then we may stay our hand at once, nor waste labor in absurd expostulations of honesty. I had as lief preach humanity to a battle of eagles, as to urge honesty and integrity upon those who have *determined* to be rich, and to gain it by gambling stakes, and madmen's ventures.

All the bankruptcies of commerce are harmless compared with a bankruptcy of public morals. Should the Atlantic ocean break over our shores, and roll sheer across to the Pacific, sweeping every vestige of cultivation, and burying our wealth, it would be a mercy, compared to that ocean-deluge of dishonesty and crime, which, sweeping over the whole land, has spared our wealth and taken our virtue. What are cornfields and vineyards, what are stores and manufactures, and what are gold and silver, and all the precious commodities of the earth, among beasts?—and what are men, bereft of conscience and honor, but beasts?

We will forget those things which are behind, and hope a more cheerful future. We turn to you, YOUNG MEN!—All good men, all patriots, turn to watch your advance upon the stage, and to implore you to be worthy of yourselves, and of your revered ancestry. Oh! ye favored of Heaven! with a free land, a noble inheritance of wise laws, and a prodigality of wealth in prospect,—advance to your possessions!—May you settle down, as did Israel of old, a people of God in a promised and protected land;—true to yourselves, true to your country, and true to your God.

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**Footnote:**

[1] Monroe Edwards, a notorious forger.—ED.

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