

# *He CARED about HONESTY*



This 1903 cartoon was captioned: Must Be Got Rid of Before the Performance Begins

REPRINT FROM HARPER'S WEEKLY, JUNE 20, 1903

Collier's for September 8, 1951

# in Government...



**M**OST of the articles written about the first half of the twentieth century have dwelt upon the tremendous changes and scientific advances, for good and evil, that have taken place. But this is a story of human traits and ethical standards that have not been altered by the transition from horse-and-buggy days to the supersonic age.

Fifty years ago, on September 14, 1901, Theodore Roosevelt became President, succeeding the assassinated William McKinley. He was young, vigorous, a scrupulously honest man who was determined that the government, as long as he was President, was going to be honest. And it was not long before he had a chance to prove that determination.

There were no mink coats or deep freezers connected with the Washington scandals of 1903. But, like the scandals of 1951, they involved important figures of the party in power. The mess—and it was a bad one—was in the Post Office Department. It went back to appointees of McKinley, Cleveland and Hayes. Now and again honest employees had tried to tell their chiefs that something was rotten, and had been fired for their pains.

During McKinley's last year in the White House the Fourth Assistant Postmaster General, Joseph W. Bristow, had uncovered fraud in the Cuban postal service under the American occupation. He suggested that an investigation might be in order. The First Assistant, Perry S. Heath, yelled for help. All the big guns moved into action. Bristow's neck was saved by McKinley's personal intervention. But there was no investigation.

Bristow lay low for a while. But he had told the story of corruption in his department to a young newspaper editor from his home state of Kansas, William Allen White, and White had told the story to Roosevelt. He told his First Assistant Postmaster General, Robert J. Wynne, to do a little investigating on his own. Wynne did, and found plenty.

Now if there was anything that Roosevelt didn't want, it was a scandal in the executive departments. A Presidential election was coming up the next year. The "President by accident" greatly wanted to be elected in his own right. He already had a fight on his hands over the issue of trust-regulation. A scandal would play into the hands of those business interests and newspapers which were opposing him. The fact that the scandal was not his fault would make little difference.

But Roosevelt determined to practice what he had preached. He appointed Bristow special investigator. But Bristow, still smarting from his previous painful experience, wanted to know if the President would keep the politicians off his neck. Roosevelt said he would, and soon got a chance to prove it.

As soon as rumors of the investigation got about, a group of Republican senators descended on the President. They were glad he was going to put a stop to corruption, they said, but they hoped he would avoid a scandal. "Make an example, Mr. President, of some one man, and let the others quietly resign." Roosevelt told them that he was after all offenders, politics or no politics.

The unsavory Post Office stew boiled over before Bristow was fairly started. Two top officials of the department were arrested for taking bribes from contractors. Another resigned. A fourth was dismissed when it appeared that during his illness, his wife had removed government papers from his office.

The country began to wonder who and what next. So did the party leaders. They were honest men, but they were also politicians. And they were scared and miserable. When a postal employee named Tulloch came up with 50 pages of fresh, detailed charges, the Postmaster General, Henry C. Payne, lost his head and told reporters that the charges were all "hot air." The papers gleefully seized the phrase and didn't let Payne or the country forget it. But Roosevelt, who returned from a trip around the country in June, told the Postmaster General that the investigation would be pursued "until the department has been purged of even the suspicion of dishonesty."

As the weeks passed, the scandal became hotter than a Washington summer. New crimes, ranging from petty graft to bribery, blackmail and conspiracies to defraud, were revealed almost daily, and indictments multiplied. More and more friends of Republican stalwarts were involved. The chorus of pleas to call off the probe "for the good of the party" became almost tearful. Finally a New York delegation called on the President at his summer home in Oyster Bay with a message from the governor which warned that, if a leading state senator were indicted, the Republicans would lose New York in 1904.

"I am interested in carrying New York," Roosevelt said, "more interested than anyone

else. But I am not going to let up on any grafter, no matter what the political effect may be. Besides, though we may, in my judgment, lose the state—*may*, I said, mind you—if we make it evident that we intend to prosecute every guilty man, we shall certainly lose it if we don't."

The investigation continued, and so did the pressure to stop it. When the Justice Department appeared to be dragging its feet, Roosevelt was ready to appoint a group of bipartisan assistants to speed things up. When the Postmaster General started giving the press evasive answers, the President let the country know that he was backing Bristow to the finish.

By October, Roosevelt wrote to Elihu Root, his Secretary of War, "The postal scandal is being wound up. We have cut deep, and we have indicted or turned out of office every guilty man." Bristow's report was published in November. It was accompanied by a memorandum from Roosevelt. And his words, after nearly half a century, are pertinent reading today for a public whose recollections of the RFC investigation, the Kefauver hearings, the "five per centers" and the unsolved Kansas City ballot thefts are still fresh:

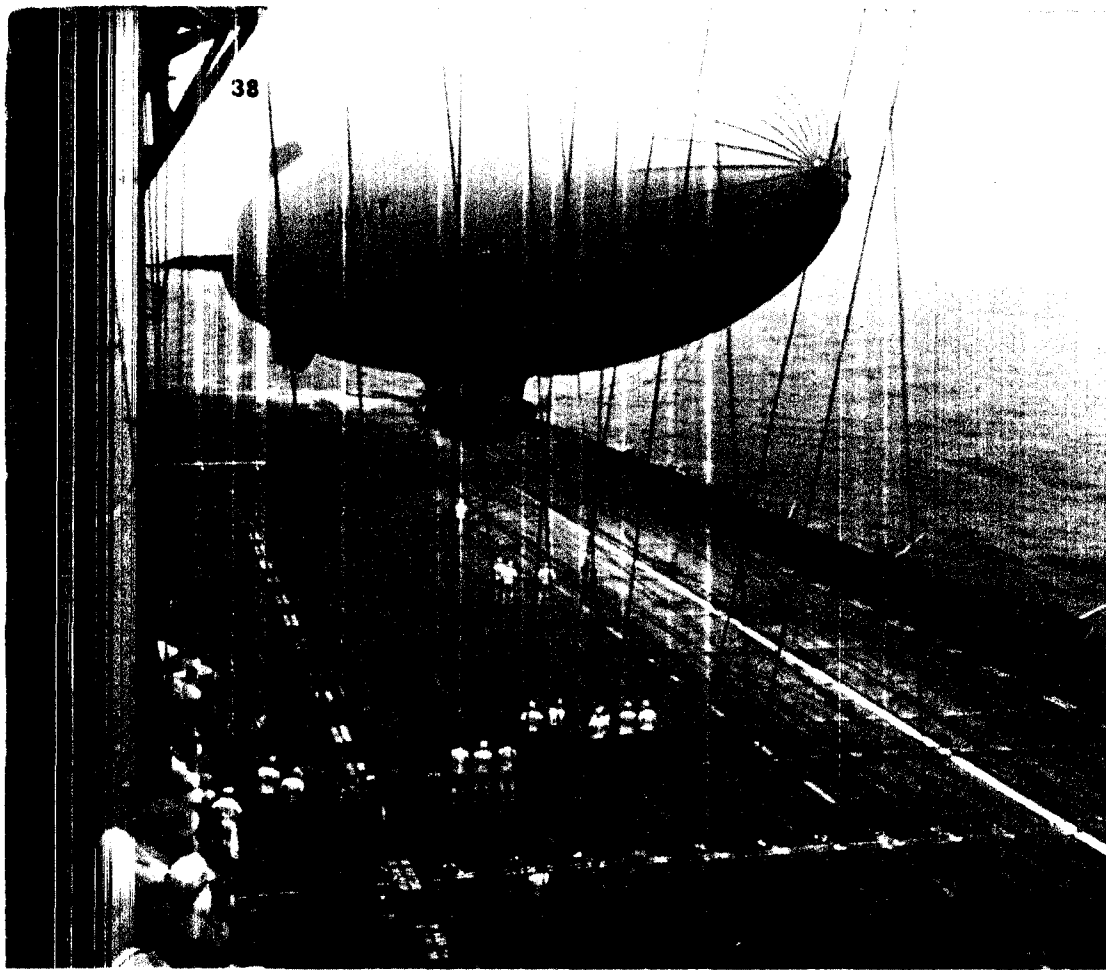
"All questions of difference in party policy sink into insignificance when the people of the country are brought face to face with a question like this, which lies at the root of honest and decent government. On this question, and on all others like it, we can afford to have no division among good citizens.

"In the last resort, good laws and good administration must rest upon the broad basis of sound public opinion. A dull public conscience, an easygoing acquiescence in corruption, infallibly mean debasement in public life, and such debasement in the end means the ruin of free institutions. Freedom is not a gift which will tarry long in the hands of the dishonest, or of those so foolish or so incompetent as to tolerate dishonesty in their public servants."

That, then, is the story of the scandals of a half century ago. There remains only this postscript, with a moral which also might be valid in reverse: Roosevelt was nominated by acclamation the year after the postal investigation, and elected by the greatest popular majority given up to that time to any President.

THE EDITORS





The Navy had Joint Conference members aboard carrier F.D.R. for two days, put on submarine show, simulated attack on carrier task force, landed 251-foot blimp on deck



The Air Force showed civilians napalm bombing, let them inspect B-36, gave them rides in jet planes, took them through hangars, invited them to church on Sunday

The Army show at Fort Benning took one day, concentrated on demonstrations of tank team techniques and airborne training devices. It followed two-day Marine display



## Collier's COLOR CAMERA



In Pentagon, Secretary of Defense Marshall told how department works, asked guests to take message home

# Inspection Arms

THE Department of Defense of the U.S.A. is responsible for more men, more money, more transportation, more inventory, more real estate than most citizens can even begin to understand. As a result, it has a difficult time talking to people. It's just too blamed bulky to get close enough to shake hands.

To remedy the situation, Defense's Office of Information releases reams of stories to the nation's press, produces radio and television programs and distributes thousands of magazine features and photographs. But even these are not quite enough to satisfy the Pentagon. It prefers sitting down with civilians and having man-to-man chats.

Best answer so far to the department's itch to talk is a project originated during World War II and brought to full success in the past two years. Essentially a series of inspection tours staged by the military for nonmilitary citizens, the project, under the direction of Commander John Paul Floyd, is officially known as the Joint Civilian Orientation Conferences (J.C.O.C.). Four times a year the Department of Defense invites groups of 80 industrial, professional, press, religious, labor, civic, farm and government leaders to come to Washington and meet the Secretary of Defense, his deputies, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and scores of Pentagon bigwigs. It then takes them on a 10-day flying trip to Quantico, Virginia, to see the Marines in action; to Fort Benning, Georgia, for an Army show; to Eglin Air Force Base in Florida to watch Air Force maneuvers; and to Norfolk (Virginia) Naval Base to visit the Navy.

Conference members represent a geographic cross section of the nation. Almost all are men of influence, who will go back home and tell the folks what the Department of Defense is doing to ensure the welfare of its personnel and the safety of the nation. Thus, the Pentagon is able to get closer to great segments of the country.

Most recent of the department's Joint Conferences was held this summer. The Army, Navy, Marines and Air Force trotted out everything in their arsenals; put on shows using live ammunition; let security-checked visitors peek at new techniques and weapons; made 13 speeches to them in two days in Washington, and a good dozen more in the remaining eight days; and shared bunks and chow with them.

In general, this Ninth J.C.O.C. made such men as Joseph B. Hall, president of the Kroger grocery and supermarket chain, Harry Bullis of General Mills, Inc., and Dr. Charles Mayo of Mayo Clinic feel that the military is on its toes. Said Arch N. Booth, executive vice-president of the Chamber of Commerce of the U.S.: "... This trip gave me new insight into some of the reasons for the enormous costs of war." His reaction was just what J.C.O.C. aims at producing. It makes the military feel that all Americans are beginning to understand the tremendous job behind the defense of freedom.

SEY CHASSLER

PHOTOGRAPHS FOR COLLIER'S BY BOB SMALLMAN