

## PERFORMANCE AND CREDIT.

Mr. Wade Ellis, chairman of the Republican Executive Committee of Ohio, is promptly out in an interview with the assertion that Congress has kept all the Administration's pledges, and that nothing remains but to count up the big majorities by which President Taft will be sustained in Ohio and everywhere else. This is a trifle premature. There can be no doubt, however, that the unexpectedly good record of the session has led to the revising of a great many political figures. Mr. Taft unquestionably came off with a much better showing of laws enacted than for a long time seemed possible. For this result his personal activity is conceded to have been largely responsible, and it cannot be denied that his prestige, both personal and political, is correspondingly heightened. They are not very delicate scales of justice in which the people roughly weigh such things; and as politics go, Mr. Taft will get most of the credit for what Congress did, just as he would have received most of the blame if it had failed to do anything. But those who strive to make a nicer estimate of performance and credit therefor must see that there is something to be done besides lumping the whole thing.

In the matter of the railway bill, for example, it has to be noted that the measure which finally passed bore very little resemblance to the bill which the Attorney-General kindly drafted for Congress. In the course of debate many of its clauses were entirely rejected, others radically made over, while several new provisions were inserted. Thus, if there were to be a strict apportionment of credit, a great deal would have to be set down to the account of the insurgent Senators, who, with the Democrats, really shaped the law in many of its main features. Nor should the exertions of the House insurgents be overlooked. They broke down the autocratic power of the Speaker's machine, and undoubtedly contributed in that way to the passage of the railway bill in a form much more satisfactory than we should otherwise have got. Moreover, they demonstrated that it is not necessary to have a little clique in absolute control of the House in order to "get things done." In praising, as he does to-day, the past session as one of the most fruitful in legislation that he has ever known, Speaker Cannon is tacitly

giving the lie to his former protest that the destruction of his individual power would make it impossible for the Administration to get any laws passed at all.

In referring to these aspects of the case, we have not the slightest thought of taking from the President what is his due. The general opinion in these matters is likely to be pretty nearly right, and there can be no question that the general opinion about President Taft has changed very much during the past few weeks. Perhaps his fortunes were not actually at so low an ebb two months ago as most people thought, and possibly all is not so clear sailing for him now as his friends assert; but there is no dispute that he stands much better with the country, and that this is to be accounted for largely by his success in inducing Congress to enact so many of the bills he favored. In the language of his favorite sport, the President has made a fine "recovery," after slicing badly into the long grass, but it still remains to be seen how skilfully he will be able to approach the November green and hole out.

It is needless to go again over the list of bills which are displayed as so many Presidential trophies. To them was added in the dying hours of Congress a law to compel the publishing of election expenses. This, too, was a measure to which the President stood committed, and it was presumably owing to his urging that it was finally passed. It is a novelty in Federal legislation, but is in line with the most progressive State laws, and ought to prove a useful check upon inordinate or corrupt expenditure in national elections. To have been able to add this important act to the railway bill, a conservation bill, the postal-savings law, the Statehood bill, with several minor measures, certainly entitles the President to the felicitations which he is receiving.

At one point he confesses that his programme has failed. He has not been able to compass the economies in government which he strove for. The estimates vary as usual, but it seems certain that the total appropriations of the Congress will exceed those of the past fiscal year by from \$10,000,000 to \$40,000,000. If the President had vetoed the river and harbor bill, carrying more than \$50,000,000, he would have turned the balance on the right side. And a veto would

have been highly popular. It would have served also to deepen the impression of his political force and courage. He himself frankly says that at one time he thought it would be his duty to veto the bill, but careful consideration inclined his judgment the other way. He concluded that the meritorious and indispensable projects so far outweighed the doubtful or indefensible appropriations that the good ought not to be sacrificed in defeating the evil. We have no doubt that Mr. Taft took pains to reach a judicial decision in this matter; and to stand by it may have required more courage than would have been demanded by a veto sure to be applauded. His determination to sign the bill, however, accentuates the bad practice of holding back such log-rolling measures till the final days of Congress, when there is no chance to reconsider them after a veto. If the President could have vetoed separate items, it is clear that many of those in the river and harbor bill would have fallen before his pen; and in reluctantly deciding to approve, Mr. Taft knew that he was fixing the charge of extravagance upon a Congress legislating in a time of Treasury deficits.

All this balancing of performance and credit is usually the preliminary to confident prophecies. In fact, sweeping predictions are made in the press: the President will be triumphantly vindicated at the polls; his eleventh-hour recovery will not avail to save him, and the Democrats will win a great victory in the autumn elections. The reader may make his choice according to taste and fancy. However, after a time of such political confusion as we have been going through, the wise man will be chary of prophecies. He will first demand a guarantee that present conditions will continue; and before deciding that the record of Congress will be sufficient to carry the Administration through, he will want to be assured that the voters are going to make that record the chief issue. They may possibly vote in resentment of high prices, which Congress did nothing to lower. All told, there never was a better time for prophets to hold their peace and to wait for that infallible wisdom which comes after the event.

## PLAIN HONESTY INSPIRING.

Two public men have recently been subject to the same criticism. They do not closely resemble each other, whether in their personal traits or their political convictions, but the objection has been made to both alike that they are uninspiring. Of Gov. Harmon of Ohio it is admitted that he is upright and able, a hard worker, an enemy of rascality, a vigorous hunter down of corruptionists, but, it is added, there is nothing stirring or thrilling about him. A Westerner when asked what he thought of Harmon as a possible Democratic candidate for the Presidency, replied: "Oh, he's a good man, but archaic. He is not capable of uttering a note of spiritual summons." Our readers must know how often similar remarks have been made concerning President Taft. "Oh, yes, a solid and steady man, no doubt, but too easy-going and humdrum, no dash about him, no clarion appeal."

Now, we do not wish to write a word against enthusiasm in public life or brilliant leadership and magnetic personalities. These things are of the highest value, and at times they are absolutely indispensable. When mighty abuses are to be attacked and uprooted we are thankful enough if some man of native energy and audacity and infectious zeal comes along to get up an excitement and rouse the masses of the people and build up a great personal following and call forth the driving forces without which radical reforms cannot be carried to completion. But such political geniuses are rare. Their rarity is one proof of their genius. And the fact that we sometimes fall upon a period when there is a dearth of such men, or of the crises which call them into activity, is no excuse for shutting our eyes and hearts to the sturdy if less showy qualities of other men. It might be argued, in fact, that one of the evils which follow in the wake of a captivating and spectacular leader is that he spoils a certain number of men. They must always, after their experience with him, be set vibrating with emotion and be thrilled by spectacles of political daring, or they lose all interest and refuse to budge. If one good custom may corrupt the world, one public man all fire and dynamics may leave behind him a set of citizens with jaded but yearning sensibilities, who will not be satisfied until

they again have a leader ready to drink up Esel and eat crocodiles.

It is, in a word, dangerous for the public palate to be fed so long on highly-spiced food that it rebels at good bread. Moreover, the very susceptibility to political emotion has, by the process, been narrowed in range. For our part we should think it a very bad sign if men like Harmon and Taft lost their peculiar appeal to Americans. Is there nothing to move us in the sight of a Governor pushing aside the selfish promptings of the bosses of his own party, little and big, and going straight on to do what he thinks right? Have we lost our power to respond to displays of downright honesty and independence? If we have, we had better look to the state of our own souls before complaining that men in public life have become very flat, stale, and unprofitable to us. We pity that man who did not feel his pulses quicken as he read the calm but determined reply of President Taft to the labor leaders. There was no firing of the Ephesian dome about it, but there was a quiet courage in it, and a manly note, that are really as thrilling as the sound of a trumpet.

We would also ask those who impatiently demand grand spiritual uplift and passionate appeals from their leaders, to note the fact that the great mass of government work is not theatrical, but plodding. It will not do for high officials to be always in a condition of lofty exaltation, seeing visions and warning the people and leading on the valiant host. There is an immense amount of humdrum labor which they must attend to; and what they need is not shouting and triumphant song, but the sober qualities of industry, thoroughness, sagacity, honesty as long as the day, and sincerity as transparent as light. We cannot be always storming breaches and slaying dragons; there are a thousand and one bills to be drafted and scrutinized, appointments to be made, scoundrels to be unearthed, public charities to be sweetened and made more efficient, leaks in the Treasury to be stopped, assaults on the public honor to be repelled—in short, a vast and complex work of administration to be done. And we maintain that the honest, the courageous, the indomitable man sticking to these thankless but necessary tasks is really as much of a hero there in the routine dust of his official duties, and

is truly as inspiring a figure, as the other who charges the battlements and sets the crowd to huzzaing. We repeat that we are not averse to political excitements when there is fit occasion for them. The alarm-bell must be rung, as Burke said, and a clamor raised, when the house is on fire. But we should be ashamed to ask for glories every day, on pain of becoming indifferent, or to refuse our meed of admiration to the exhibition of the homely virtues which, after all, make up nine-tenths of what is important in our public life.

## SERIOUS HUMORISTS.

Mark Twain's memory may suffer from a certain paradoxical habit we have fallen into when passing judgment on the illustrious dead. The habit consists in picking out for particular commendation in the man what one least expects. If the world thinks of him as a great humorist, the point to make is that at bottom he was really a philosopher. If his shafts struck at everybody and everything, the thing to say is that he liked best what he hit hardest. If one of his books sold five thousand copies, the attempt is made to base his future fame on the comparatively unknown book. The motive behind such reasoning is commendable enough. It is the desire not to judge superficially, the desire to get at the "real" man behind the mask which all of us, according to tradition, wear in life. It is a praiseworthy purpose, but, in the hands of the unskilled or the careless, a perilous one. And worse than either is the intellectual snob whose business it is constitutionally to disagree with the obvious. We make no attempt to classify the writer who has declared that Mark Twain, when he wrote "Innocents Abroad," was terribly in earnest; that he set out to satirize and was funny only because he could not help it. This represents the extreme of a tendency that is made manifest on every side, to turn Mark Twain into everything but what he was—a great compeller of laughter.

One gets dreadfully weary of such topsy-turvy criticism. There are times when one would like to believe that Napoleon will be remembered because he won Austerlitz and Marengo, and not because he divided up France into a vast number of small peasant holdings; that Lincoln was a great man because