

## War, Waste, and Business

**B**IT by bit facts are emerging which show that our participation in the European War was attended with the same orgy of graft and incompetence that has been present in other conflicts. Many persons had hoped that the higher ideals professed would lead to a better morality in public service, and available information up to the close of the war seemed to bear this out. But that was due, it now appears, partly to the shortness of hostilities and partly to the fact that the social and legal code which ruled during the war made it impossible for anybody to utter a word of criticism without being branded by his associates as pro-German or prosecuted by the Government for sedition. The revelations of folly in aircraft construction provided the first considerable jar to our self-complacency. These have been followed by evidence of outrageous profiteering on the part of many of our most patriotic business enterprises; by charges that the War Department has held food and other supplies out of the domestic market so as not to lower prices to the disadvantage of business interests, and has scrapped or sold for a song a vast amount of material abroad; and now by testimony before a Congressional investigating committee which shows the United States Shipping Board's activities to have been redundant with incompetence, waste, and graft and its personnel to have embraced an extraordinary number of incompetents, scoundrels, and plain unvarnished thieves.

It is only fair to allow for a generous amount of ignorance and extravagance in connection with our shipping program. The job was at least second in importance, if not superior, to that of the War Department, but, whereas the army had a body of trained officers and an organization to begin with, the Shipping Board had to create out of thin air an industry which had become virtually extinct in America—that of building and operating deepwater vessels. The need of new tonnage was vital; speed was a prime consideration. How to find or train technically the men to create and manage this new industry was a stupendous problem. But it is clear that the Shipping Board's activities have suffered not merely by haste and lack of knowledge but by the presence of scores of officers and other employees who have loafed in well-paid jobs, winked at graft in plain sight, or deliberately lined their pockets with plunder. And the worst of it is that this not only took place during the pressure of the war but has been going on ever since.

According to investigators for the Walsh Committee, heavy and inexcusable losses were sustained by contracts for shipyards so far inland that canals would have to be dredged in order to launch ships. One company was awarded a contract for ten vessels, but after six months the only visible construction was a tool house. The National Shipbuilding Company of Savannah established a yard a mile from the place where it had represented itself to have a going plant, and the Government had to supply money to dredge a marsh before operations could be started. The yard did not complete a ship. The case is now in the hands of the United States District Attorney, but it is declared that every effort is being made to shelve the prosecution. This same yard, which cost \$285,000 and contained materials valued at \$245,000, was recently sold for \$39,000, although the Shipping Board had a standing offer of \$65,000 for it without the materials. One thrifty contractor is cited who

bought lifeboats from the salvage service of the Navy for \$10 and sold them to the Shipping Board for \$110. In the assignment of vessels for operation, well-established companies have found it impossible to get vessels, while inexperienced and irresponsible organizations known as "war babies" have obtained allocations. Among other companies successful in getting ships was one headed by a dealer in theatrical costumes. Gratuities and bribes have been common and political influence has been prominent. The financial affairs of the Shipping Board are in such condition that 4,000 employees, costing \$8,000,000 annually, are still trying to straighten out the tangle. If we were not dulled to emotional appeals we should all hang our heads with shame at this exposure.

The Shipping Board scandals are an indictment of the methods of present-day American business. For the Shipping Board was above everything else the contribution to the war of our best business minds. It was organized and directed by Edward N. Hurley, Charles M. Schwab, and others of our most eminent captains of industry. American business has loved to regard itself as the most efficient in the world. It is true that in the direction of standardization and quantity production we are leaders, but extravagance and carelessness made it impossible for us adequately to compete in the international market—the acid test of industrial supremacy—until the European War gave us a unique and abnormal advantage. We are now facing a period of business deflation. If it is met honestly and intelligently, we shall benefit by it. If, instead, our business men try to save their faces and their jobs by reducing the wages of their workers and making organized labor a scapegoat, they will invite and deserve disaster. To begin at the bottom and work up is a good way in certain circumstances; but what our modern business system needs is an overhauling that will begin at the top and work down.

## The Strolling Players

**T**HE strolling players of Scarron have joined those others who traveled in the car of Thespis. The wandering comedian belongs to a dying race. Yet it dies hard. The instinct of the mime is strong and the roads of the earth are many. We thought we had seen our last company of such players suddenly and somewhat forlornly descend upon a Knights of Pythias hall in a Southern village many years ago, when, behold, in 1914, in Marion, Ohio—as yet unknown to fame—we came upon another boldly strutting through a curious two-act play about a Kentucky colonel, a Yankee villain, and a wronged wife. And two years later, in an amusement park on the straggling outskirts of a larger city of the Middle West, there turned up a strange, brave little troupe playing, of all things, Ibsen's "Ghosts," and playing it far from contemptibly, before a handful of astonished yokels, a group of tight-lipped priests who had wandered in from a neighboring vicarage, and a large bat that whirled through the barn-like hall and thudded softly against the hanging lamps. The players slipped away—lonely symbols of an ancient and perishing mode of life and art. There may be still other troupes, shadowy and obscure survivals. No one sets down the story of their doings or their fate. How many people know that, till but the other day, the old show-boats still plied up and down the Ohio River? The crew consisted of actors; the captain was manager and lead-

ing man. The boats contained a hall and a stage, dropped anchor at remote landings and lit their lights, and the villagers came on board to see old melodramas acted and to listen to sad stories of the deaths of kings. The late David Graham Phillips introduced a show-boat into his story of Susan Lenox. But his account is tawdry and episodic and no reliable history of these strange craft exists; they have still no Scarron.

It is not the moving picture show that has given the strolling players their coup de grace; it is the road company. The members of these companies are anything but adventurous mimes seeking the open roads of a gay world. They are employees. They might as well be in shops. To them one-night stands in the Canadian Northwest are as stripped of essential adventure as working on the "subway circuit" in Brooklyn or the Bronx. Pullman coaches connect the houses controlled by the theatrical trusts from Alaska to the Gulf of Mexico and the players carry the echoes of last year's Broadway hits from Fargo to Mobile. The wildest of the ancient arts is organized on a nation-wide business basis and seventy-five dollars a week plus railroad expenses paid from the New York office drains the last drop of adventurousness from the player's bones. Tales of stranded road-companies, of shifts and quaint accidents are out of date. All the hotels serve grape-fruit for breakfast and the same dishes with the same names in bad French for dinner. The development of civilization, in flat contradiction of Spencer's definition, is from variety to sameness, and soon the dusty fellow with a collapsible merry-go-round will be the last representative of the wandering mimes who were proud, shabby, and eloquent upon the roads to Babylon and in the shadow of the great cathedrals.

No wonder that romantic souls have been eager somehow to revive the long tradition of the traveling show. From Greenwich Village came last season the announcement of a Caravan Theater. But no one seems to have summoned it. A similar message comes from England this season and they who send it may have better luck. Mr. Stuart Walker's "Portmanteau Theater" remains, however, the typical experiment of its kind. It, too, has left the roads. But for certain seasons it fared up and down the land. Only, alas, it did not go to the people. No square or town-hall was suddenly lifted into passion, poetry, and wonder because of its coming. It was cannily summoned with expenses guaranteed by Drama League centers and women's clubs. It lacked robustness, breadth, and popularity in the nobler sense. The little plays were tenuous and neo-romantic and far more like millinery than like folk-ballads. Later on Mr. Walker gave some superb productions and wrote one very beautiful play. But he was too aloof and also too artful to revive the tradition of the strolling players. If ever we are to have such again, they must be more like Vachel Lindsay in the days when he chanted his rhymes for a supper and a night's lodging. They must flee the hot atmosphere of the scented studio and the "little theater" and all contamination of experts in the decorative arts. A platform, a passion, a burning thought and youth—these are their only needs. Perhaps some day a group of young collegians—we have seen and known possible ones—instead of drifting to schools of acting or "arty" cliques, will take to the road and act both Shakespeare and Ibsen on the Main Streets of towns and villages and redeem hungry souls from the toils and graces of the stars of the "Realart," the "Metro," and the "Universal."

## Rome Rolls Round Again

IN the austere days of the Republic the Romans, Senators and plain men alike, often used the Tiber for their baths, satisfied, according to Seneca, with a weekly ablution and not disposed to demand too much in the way of luxurious surroundings. Scipio Africanus had a warm bath in his villa at Liternum, and Maecenas went so far as a whole swimming tank of hot water. But with the Empire came the fleshpots; baths private and public (*balneae*) and Imperial (*thermae*) crowded the city. No less a person than Galen drew up rules for what became a ritual as well as a regimen, and the *thermae* grew into centers of fashionable life. Is something like this going on in Washington? The Potomac is no longer enough for our Senators. Not even the private baths of the town seem to suffice. Only eight years ago, when the power in Congress swung from the aristocratic Republicans to the simple Democrats, the newly installed Senatorial baths came under the lash of the Jeffersonians, and for eight years have been undeveloped and deserted. Now, however, there is a stir in these quarters. The extravagance of letting the equipment lie unused, some Senators think, is as great as the extravagance of using it. A committee has consequently been chosen to save the country's money by spending that of the Senators, who will have baths as sumptuous as the toils of their office require.

It is a pretty picture that comes to mind at the thought. The Senators, if the great Greco-Roman traditions are kept up, will take off their togas in the *apodyterium*, move on to the *elaeothesium* to be anointed with oil, and thence proceed to the violent exercise of games such, no doubt, as in modern terminology are called hand-ball or medicine-ball. Then through the *tepidarium*, a room mildly warm, into the *calidarium*, where the heat will amount to something; after this to the *frigidarium*, for the shock of a cold bath, which our Senators can take with accessories of needle and drench showers which would have frightened Scipio Africanus and sent Cato Major, in a Spartan huff, back to his Sabine farm. The climax for the Senators of Washington will of course come when, having gone in turn through the *calidarium* again, they emerge into the *laconicum* or hot air room, devised in ancient times by the wise Lacedaemonians. After that the toga again, and ready for the fray.

It is a pretty picture, and such disturbing elements as the electric cabinet or shocks from the static machine cannot spoil the antique look of the picture. Here some conscript father with whiskers of tender pink sits languidly upon a slab of purple marble and swaps votes with a rough-hewn Senator from the State Sherman marched through to the sea. Here the most literary of the Senators floats lightly in the plunge bath and talks of the lives of Washington and Webster to the Republican Senator who most stubbornly withstood the innovation of suffrage for women. Yonder the Senator who most violently longs for war with Mexico thumps the punching bag until the sound of his blows echoes into the *laconicum* and even into the *apodyterium*. Elsewhere Democrats and Republicans, between whom the election has drawn sectional lines, fight the Civil War again with medicine balls. Outside in the vestibule lounge the secretaries, holding clients and constituents at bay. Life swarms and eddies round the Senatorial baths; the League and treaty wait; prices stay up; ideals stay down. Within the baths the great tradition of government goes on.