

LOOK FOR THE TRUTH

There are a number of well-known and widely quoted proverbial sayings in our language which, because they are epigrammatic in form and hoary with age, are wrongly regarded as infallible, indisputable truths. Such sayings—fortunately only an insignificant few among thousands of pure golden nuggets of human wisdom—have a pernicious influence because they are often interpreted too broadly and too literally and then used to excuse wrong-doing.

For instance people often remind themselves and each other that "all is fair in love and war," seeking thus to gloss over practices which they know to be evil both inherently and in their effects. Every right-minded thinking person readily recognizes that nothing that is not fair and honorable in the every-day, prosaic relations of life is fair in love. Similarly there are certain practices which are rightly regarded by all honest men and by international law as entirely unfair, inhuman and unjust in war; all of the truly civilized nations religiously avoid them.

No-one by any kind of logic can show that it is fair to compel military or civilian prisoners of war to work under fire from the guns of their compatriots, to put poison in wells, to scatter deadly microbes, to bomb hospitals or attack hospital ships—although the Germans, whose elastic morals and convenient philosophy made anything fair and justifiable if it offered them any advantage, were guilty of just such offenses and numerous others as bad or worse in the late war.

Clearly it would be unwise in many instances to follow literally the advice attributed to Cervantes: "When thou art at Rome do as they do at Rome." Yet people often take this counsel as an excuse for doing when they are among strangers things which they would blush to do among their neighbors and friends.

No argument is needed to show that it would be an act of hypocrisy, an unmistakable indication of moral weakness, for a professed total abstainer, a man who tries to walk uprightly before those with whom he associates daily, seeking to avoid everything that is generally regarded in his community as evil and immoral, to indulge in strong drink when he was among drinkers, to gamble when he found himself in a gambling crowd or to steal if those in whose company he happened to be stole.

The saying "a bad beginning makes a good ending," is never necessarily true. If a bad beginning really assured a good ending no sane person would take pains to start a building on a good solid foundation; to build an education on a logical, substantial groundwork or to start a business career under condition as favorable as possible. Instead of trying for an auspicious beginning of their undertakings men would all strive for the worst one possible, would deliberately

seek to bungle everything most stupidly at the outset.

Everyone can recall undertakings that have started inauspiciously and apparently with everything wholly against their success and yet they came out in the end perfectly fine and well. The same people will as readily instance projects which started bad and ended as bad as they started—some of them even worse.

Likewise most of us have seen things start out in the most encouraging manner imaginable and then end in indifferent success, frequently in utter failure. As a rule, though, whatever starts well ends well. Obviously, the chances are all against a thing that gets a bad start, because it is handicapped from the beginning and unfavorable conditions are more likely than not to remain unfavorable until the end, if they don't grow worse.

We are often told that "the better the day the better the deed" and many people accept the statement at its full face value. Its fallacy is readily discoverable; if a deed is bad it is bad, no matter how good the day, and if it is good, how can the day possibly make it anything else? What are "good" and "bad" days, anyhow?

If it were actually and literally true, as many people say and believe, that "early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise," many people would have health, wealth and wisdom in abundance who are decidedly shy on part or all of these items. On the other hand, many who are living in opulence, with fairly good health and some measure of wisdom, would be dead or else gasping out the last few breaths of a miserably afflicted life, in tatters and rags, and the proverbial last year's bird's-nest would be a whole library of knowledge in comparison with their scanty stock of wisdom.

Numerous other venerable sayings, as well as proverbial statements of a later vintage, all, like the foregoing, more or less misleading, could be named. Let us all be on our guard against gulping down as sterling truth any and every statement, whether old or new, that comes along camouflaged as simon-pure, 18-carat wisdom. As we have tried to show, some of them may lead into error; all whose truth is not perfectly obvious should be carefully and honestly analyzed before we accept them literally and make them part of the guiding philosophy of our lives.

WHO MAY WEAR UNIFORMS

The war department gives out the following information relative to the wearing of the U. S. army uniform: Reserve officers not on active duty may wear the uniform of their corps and rank on occasion of military ceremony, on public holidays, and when directing or instructing cadets. The proper collar insignia, "U. S." with superimposed "R" in gilt, must then be worn. By a recent act of congress anyone who served in the army during the late war is allowed to wear the uniform of his rank if marked with the red chevron. Under the same provision reserve officers may wear—with the prescribed red chevron—the uniform they were authorized to wear at the date of their discharge from active service.