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### *An Innovation*

An incident mentioned in an editorial column of this paper on Friday last seems to me worthy of greater attention than it has been accorded. One need not be over-addicted to the optimist's cheery habit of "hailing the dawn of a new era" to see in it a certain significance and the promise of a new and better order of things in the social and political life of the far future. The incident referred to is this:

A certain member of the Oakland City Council, whose name (Woodward) is immaterial, is pretty generally believed to have betrayed the people—not his "constituents," for, being appointed by the mayor, he has but one. It is held that in voting for a water-order Mr. Woodward was actuated by an improper motive; that, in brief, he is a rascal.

This may or may not be true—I know nothing about it; but that view of the matter has commended itself to a group of fairly respectable citizens who occupy offices in the building infested by the Woodward. These gentlemen, deeming themselves holier than he, have united in a petition to the owner of the building, suggesting that he invite Mr. Woodward to seek other quarters, where the disadvantages of his presence in the flesh will accrue to others, and themselves know the happiness of exemption.

It must be confessed that at first thought there seems in this a hint of the boycott—and the boycott is a coward's weapon. It would have better met my views of propriety if these gentlemen had omitted the round-robin from their program of reform and contented themselves, each for himself and without consultation, with disintroducing themselves to Mr. Woodward by failing to return his salutation, by refusing his hand, by ignoring his existence generally.

The pretense that their business interests are menaced by his contenance is not very manly, and if it were true would deprive their action of all the unselfishness that there is in it. But let us not be too exacting, their action such as it is marks a distinct advance toward the light; and a first step in that direction may err a bit and fall a trifle short of its intent. Even Political Rascality itself, sitting austere in judgment upon the Social Conscience, may properly regard this count in the indictment with the leniency due to a first offense.

It is to be hoped that there may prove to be contagion in the example set by these Oakland gentlemen. There are not very many honest men and women in California, nor elsewhere. All that saves any republic from a reign of crime is an equilibrium of interests—precisely as we are saved from Theocracy by a multitude of "churches" which, quarreling in all else, unite brotherly against any one of themselves which has grown strong enough to aim at dominion. Politics is a struggle, not of principles, "as dull fools suppose," but of interests. The interests which from time to time find themselves allied with the little minority of honest men are commonly strong enough to keep society from going utterly to the devil.

But these few honest men, active as they are, do not put forth their full strength: they have "up their sleeves" something that would vastly increase their power for good in civic

affairs. If they would only play the trump card of social excommunication they would bring about a state of things that would surprise and please them.

It is not likely that politics will ever be purified and good government is a dream. At no time and in no place that we know about have men ever succeeded in getting decent service from those appointed to rule over them—not even when they have made the appointment themselves by counting their own stupid noses; but the service would assuredly be less bad if we would show ourselves a little more sincere in “denouncing” public rascality.

The rascal who can count with confidence upon the friendly salutation of an honest man and the smile of an honest woman; who can mingle on equal terms with people who do not steal, and put his legs under the mahogany of families in which the Decalogue has not been amended by elision of the negative; who is able to touch glasses with even the newspaper man whose face is still flushed from the exertion of proving him a thief in three columns—such a man naturally feels no urgent need of a change of heart and can hardly be expected to understand that there is any real sincerity in the demand that he keep out of public office. To him it seems a sufficient concession to decency to keep out of jail. One refusal of his proffered hand would hurt him worse than all the “denunciation” that he can read in a month of Sundays. If he should die of it, it would be, however, not from mortification, but from astonishment; the Californian scoundrel of rank, whether his eminence has been won from the public treasury or from private pockets, expects, and is justified by custom in expecting, the same civil treatment and consideration from honest men that they accord to one another. So long as he gets it they have not the right to complain of his misdeeds “done in the body”—that body, I mean of which he is perchance an “honorable member.”

On the whole, we seem to have about the kind of government and about the number of Woodward that we deserve.