

Graft

Ross Winn

1903

The English language is progressive. Every once in a while somebody feels a yearning for a word with a sound sufficiently expressive to relieve his pent-up emotions, and he goes forthwith and enriches the vocabulary of slangdom; and bye and bye his new word travels along east, arrives in Boston, gets into the cultured set, and a dictionary is made expressly to get it in and thus secure a scoop; and lo, a new word is added to the complexities of our ever-expanding language 'Twas but yesterday that "boodle" knocked at the door of cultured correctness, and after being repeatedly kicked out and commanded to stay away, was finally reluctantly admitted and allowed to extend its underpinning beneath the family mahogany. Now comes this new word "graft," from nobody knows where, without a letter of introduction or a certificate of character, and utterly destitute of a pedegree, and we have taken it in and put it to doing the chores and running all sorts of colloquial errands, as tho it had been in the family of legitimate English words since the days of Rare Ben Jonson.

However, the etymology of the term is not of special moment. The addition of graft to our current vocabulary is of infinitesimal importance compared to the eruptive epidemic of the detestable thing for which it stands. The grafter is an ubiquitous personality fostered upon the moribund carcas of social order by the incubater of special privilege. Graft is a combination of gall and greed. The grafter is a gentleman of accommodating principles, whose chief aim in life is to annex himself to a good thing and the public be damned. His is the gentle art of jarring loose the unsuspecting jays from their tin, and his most self-assertive characteristic is a yearning to finger other people's cash.

The grafter is nowhere more in evidence than in the vacinity of a political pull. Graft, unlike the Constitution, follows the flag. It also follows legislation and Supreme Court decisions. It displays its brazen countenance in legislative halls and lobbys, follows the marching army, and makes itself at home in court and caucus. It trails its slimy course thru all our social, financial, political and industrial affairs, And Sunday morning it puts on its black frock coat and goes to church and occupies a front pew and even climbs into the pulpit. Graft is the power behind the throne. And in the shadow of its corrupting presence society is rotting with the dry rot of moral death.

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