

HONESTY.

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"Thou shalt not steal." Exodus 20:15.

Why are most primitive people notorious thieves? There is bound to be a reason for the universality of stealing among people who do not own anything. A man in Mississippi went to Chicago on a business trip. One of the colored men on his place asked him to bring him back a bottle of gin. He got the gin and tried to find the old man when he got back. Not being able to locate him, he sent the gin by the old man's nephew. A few days later he met the old darkey and asked him if he got his gin, explaining that he sent it by his nephew. The old darkey frowned darkly and said, "Boss, no wonder I didn't git dat gin. You might as well send lettuce by a rabbit as send gin by dat boy."

Why couldn't one send lettuce by a rabbit? Because a rabbit likes lettuce too well? That may be one reason. But another reason is that the rabbit has no respect for property rights. He takes lettuce where he finds it. He had as soon eat another's lettuce as his own. In fact, he has none of his own. That is the reason he cannot be trusted.

A man who made a study of a thousand cases of embezzlement found that not one embezzler had ever saved any money himself. Will owning property make a man honest? Some who own property are not too honest about adding to it. But owning something does instill into a man respect for the property rights of others. Giving a man property or giving him the opportunity to own property may fail to make him honest. But depriving him of his God-given rights to own something himself will surely cause him to lose respect for the

property rights of others.

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Primitive people steal because they have never learned to be honest. They have nothing themselves and cannot be losers by their dishonesty. Before men can have a very high respect for the property rights of others they must know that the right to own property is theirs too. A people who have never owned anything and have no hope of owning anything are hard to teach honesty. That is the reason it was so hard to teach slaves it was wrong to steal. They saw only the one side of stealing. All the best things of life <sup>were</sup> beyond his reach if he was honest.

Booker T. Washington says when he was a little boy his mother used to wake him up in the night to eat fried chicken. That was the only time he ever got any. He did not know then the chickens were stolen. He just thought it was proper to eat fried chicken at night. He was always hungry enough to eat it any time. In later life, when he came to understand the full meaning of honesty, he did not condemn her.

Why do we chuckle when a rascal gets gypped? Why do we sympathize with Jacob when he cheats Laban? Why do we laugh when the rich miser gets robbed? In Kipling's story The Finances of the Gods Shiv cheats a greedy money lender to reward one of his faithful servants. We have a high respect for the poor man's right to his pay envelope, and scorn the man who would take it away from him. But we do not feel the same way about the purse of the man who has fleeced millions from his fellow men. If property is gained dishonestly we do not feel that it is sacred.

A man from South Carolina told me this remarkable story, which he said was true: He said there was a poor widow in his

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community who owned a small flock of hens, the eggs from which were her chief support. One morning she found that the whole flock had been stolen. A man had driven his truck back of the fowl house, cut a hole in the wire fence, and taken the chickens away without wakening her or any of her neighbors. Looking on the ground near the hole in the fence she saw a leather purse. It had eleven hundred dollars in it, and the man's name who stole her chicken, who was well known to her. Crawling under the fence the purse had been flipped from his hip pocket by the top wire. She was so honest, even when dealing with a thief, she was going to offer to give him his purse back if he would bring back her chickens. But she had a brother who saw the matter in a different light. He told her she was going to do no such thing; she was going to keep the purse and let the thief keep the chickens. If he ever claimed the purse he would go to jail. Even if this was wrong not many people would condemn her.

When some of the refugees from Europe came to America after the Second World War they wrote back to their friends in Europe about the customs in America. They said, in wonder, "In America the milkman puts the milk on the porch before day, and it is still there when the folks get up!" Their friends in Europe could hardly believe it was so. Why is the milk not stolen in America, as it surely would be in many parts of Europe or Asia?

The reason is that most people in America have milk. Even those who are not able to work and have no income are furnished milk by Welfare agencies, or by Social Security checks. But if half the people in America were too poor to buy milk, it would surely be stolen.

But why could not the poor man be taught such reverence for God's word or the law of the church, that he will respect the property rights of others, even when his own sacred rights are violated? Or why could he not be kept from dishonesty by the very severity of punishment? This has been tried many times and it has always failed. In Medieval Europe when a poor peasant died even his ax and plow went to the landlord instead of his wife and children. But he was forever being lectured by the priest that it was wrong to steal. A man was hanged even for stealing a sheep. But no matter how strong the lectures or severe the punishments, stealing did not stop till the enlightened laws of the land made it possible for the poor man to have sheep of his own.

Why cannot the slave be taught such religious reverence for the rights of his master that he will not take his goods? Because such religious maxims are not logical. If the slave is being robbed of his God-given rights to freedom and the pursuit of happiness, it is in vain to tell him that his master's right to property <sup>the slave</sup> he gained is sacred. If the peasant is being robbed daily it is in vain to tell him that the landlord's rights are sacred.

Then how are children taught that property rights are sacred, even when they own nothing? They are not. If a child is treated as an outsider he will have no respect for the property rights of his own parents. This has been proved many times. The only way to teach a child honesty is to give him a share in all that the family owns. It is not necessary to let him spend as much money as he wishes or to sell property any time he wants money. But he must be made to feel that it is his. The only

way this can be done is for the parent to keep faith with the child in every covenant. If a parent lies to the child or cheats him the child learns to do the same thing. To raise children to be honest they must have a real part in all that the family owns. This must be real, not just something told him by a parent in whom he has no faith.

One of the greatest hoaxes ever pulled on poor working men is now being pawned off on the Communists worker today. In Russia and China the working man is being told that he has an equal share in all the riches of the state. He is told that the wealth his labor is creating is being divided equally among all the people. "From each according to his ability. To each according to his need." The only pay he receives for his labor is his bread and cabbage soup. Even his clothes are a luxury that must be provided by his wife's labor. His children are not educated; they are indoctrinated. Already the people are learning the bitter truth. One of the German war prisoners who came back from Russia recently said that every one in Russia was stealing or taking bribes. What a harvest of Dragon's Teeth the Communist Governments are about to reap!