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EDITORIAL

OSTENTATION AN INVESTMENT.

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OF course it is to Mr. William J. Bryan's credit that he spurned the \$1,000,000 bribe, which, according to the story printed in the *Omaha World-Herald* of last February 27, was offered to him during the Cleveland administration if he abstained from bringing in a minority report on the bill to issue \$150,000,000 of bonds payable in gold, principal and interest. Fortunately, the statement credited to Mr. Bryan, in refusing the bribe, takes the incident from the category of a mere act of honor, priceless though that be, and raises it to the dignity of something vastly more precious—an intense flashlight on modern social science.

Mr. Bryan said: "My salary supplies my very simple wants. I do not know what I would do with the money. It is not the temptation to me that it would be to many men."

Among the many passages in Marx's *Capital* of which may be said that they illustrate the observation that Science cleanses the mind, and Ignorance soils it, there stands pre-eminent the passage in which, with economic precision, Marx speaks the normal capitalist free from vulgar ostentation, and proves that what is generally referred to and condemned as ostentation on the capitalist's part is the economic necessity he is under to "keep up and improve his credit." Marx saw far ahead, very far. Yet even his vision had its limitations. Had Marx lived to-day, with American capitalism on his dissecting table, he would have added a paragraph to his passage on ostentation, and shown that ostentation, economically necessary to the normal capitalist (before he reaches the plutocratic stage) acquires (when the plutocratic stage is reached) a function of different nature.

To-day, in America, where we have specimens of the regulation capitalist, and also specimens of his top blossom, the Top-capitalist, ostentation has two distinct

functions. In the hands of the regulation capitalist ostentation has the function of benefiting him directly; in the hands of the Top-capitalist ostentation has the function of benefiting him indirectly; in the former instance ostentation has an economic, in the latter instance a political function; in the former instance, ostentation neither has nor is intended to have an effect other than beneficent to the capitalist without hurt to others, in the latter instance ostentation has the object of securing the capitalist's safety through the degradation of society. Mr. Bryan's statement places the finger upon that specific function of ostentation.

The ostentation practised by the Top-capitalist is not needed by him for his credit; it is needed by him, however, as a pace-setter, to debauch society, and thus render his hold upon it all the stronger. The more ostentation he indulges in all the more will others strain to imitate. Their incapacity to keep up renders them ready acceptors of bribes, thus ready menials for purchase. Ostentation, figuring in that capacity, is a sociologic appetizer, requisite to capitalist rule. The million dollar bribe could not floor Mr. Bryan. He had not succumbed to the ostentation displayed to-day by capitalism. And right he was to think the bribe would have been a temptation to many men—the men to whom simple wants have been perverted by the ostentation of the land's "elite."

Ostentation, whether resorted to by the regulation or the Top Capitalist, is no vulgar act. It is a deliberate investment.

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