

# Charles McCabe

## Himself

### How to Get Honest

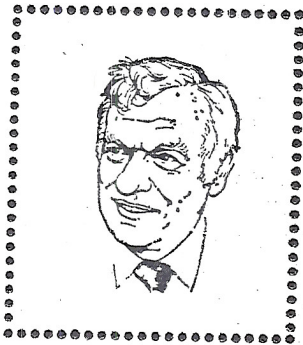
**I**T WOULD be pushing the matter too far to suggest that Mr. Archie Cox and Mr. Elliot Richardson, two Nixon appointees who came out of Watergate smelling like roses, are superior biological sports of genus Americana.

The two just seemed that way during last fall's ghastly "Saturday Night Massacre." Against a background of shoddy hucksters, legal fixers, bumbling gangsters, supine politicians, lying spokesmen and an intimidated media, the Boston pair came on like the Lord's Anointed.

The men are, indeed, New England Brahmins, a curious and compelling lot. They derive from a background of the slave trade, the opium and the rum trade, the pungent moralizings of Emerson and Thoreau, the burning of witches, and the cultivated moral ennui of Henry Adams and Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. Their money is the oldest money in this country, and their culture is most closely affixed to that of the Mother Country. To most of the rest of us they look a little strange, and talk and act likewise. They are American; but not quite like us.

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**T**HE SALIENT THING about the Brahmins is that they can afford to be honest, as honest goes. The family pile was made a long time ago, often on rum and slaves. After it was made, it was sanctified by the pieties of generations of Boston preachers, Unitarian and up.



Somebody who knew the breed well offered the "three stages of the enterprising Yankee." These were, and in order, "To get on, to get honor, to get honest."

This the Coolidges, the Eliots, the Cabots, the Adamases, the Richardsons and the Coxes have done eminently well. Mr. Richardson is as ruthless, and in fact unprincipled, a politician as we have around. How otherwise could he have so faithfully fetched and carried for Richard Nixon in so many capacities before he had enough? But on him it doesn't show. The ancient pieties are readily to hand. The iron fist is almost forgotten in the velvet glove.

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**A**LL THIS, IT CAN BE argued, is more a matter of style than of substance but there is a lot to be said for style. And even the ancient pieties have their uses. When a man is pushed far enough his family and his Brookline friends are likely to remind him of these pieties, even if only as a copout.

And at their best, the Brahmins are marvelously above it all. The year after his death in 1914 the autobiography was published of one of the ablest of the breed, Charles Francis Adams. Adams gave the back of his hand to the money-grubbers, forgetting the ones in his own stock.

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**A**S I APPROACH the end," he wrote, "I am more than a little puzzled to account for the instances I have seen of business success—money-getting. It comes from rather a low instinct. Certainly, as far as my observation goes, it is rarely met in combination with the finer or more interesting traits of character. I have known, and known tolerably well, a good many 'successful' men—'big' financially—men famous during the last half-century; and a less interesting crowd I do not care to encounter.

"Not one that I have ever known would I care to meet again, either in this world or the next; nor is one of them associated in my mind with the idea of humor, thought or refinement."

His brother, Henry, was even more brutally Brahmin: "America contained scores of men worth \$5 million or upwards, whose lives were no more worth living than those of their cooks."