

RELATION OF MORALS TO SCIENTIFIC PROGRESS

By ALEX MACKENDRICK

When an individual is miserable, what does it most of all behoove him to do? To complain of this man or of that, of this thing or of that? To fill the world and the street with lamentations and objurgations? Not so at all; the reverse of so. All moralists advise him not to complain of any person or of any thing, but of himself only. He is to know of a truth that being miserable he has been unwise. Had he faithfully followed Nature and her laws, Nature, ever true to her laws, would have yielded fruit and increase and felicity to him; but he has followed other than Nature's laws; and now Nature, her patience with him being ended, leaves him desolate; answers with very emphatic significance to him; No. Not by this road, my son; by another road shalt thou attain well-being; this, thou perceivest, is the road to ill-being; quit this. So do all moralists advise; that the man penitently say to himself first of all, Behold I was not wise enough; I quitted the laws of Fact, which are also called the laws of God, and mistook for them the laws of Sham and Semblance, which are called the Devil's Laws; therefore am I here. NEITHER WITH NATIONS THAT BECOME MISERABLE IS IT FUNDAMENTALLY OTHERWISE.

(Carlyle.)

THE BROADCAST lecture delivered by Dr L. P. Jacks on 15th February and printed in *The Listener* of the following day, deserves a more extended appreciation than the exigencies of space will allow. Though its bearing on the social problem is obvious to those who are intimately acquainted with Dr Jacks through his writings, the ambiguities of language may have misled some listeners or readers. "Real progress is progress in charity," for example. These words removed from their context may suggest to the hasty reader the idea of identifying progress with benevolent governments, or social conditions in which each man is less concerned with his own affairs which he does understand than with his neighbours which he does not. But this misinterpretation is dissipated by a sympathetic reading of the whole lecture, the purpose of which obviously is to show that the ultimate test of any development that calls itself progress must depend on the state of mind it creates in the community. If the progress is real, it will bring with it and leave behind it a spirit and atmosphere of tolerance, goodwill and kindness, all of which virtues Dr Jacks groups under the comprehensive word "Charity," using the word as does St Paul in his immortal Doxology—the thirteenth chapter of 1st Corinthians.

We have been so frequently informed by philosophers and sociologists that our intellectual development has gone ahead of the growth of our moral sense, that it has become something of an axiom which we accept with complacency—perhaps even with a touch of pride in the admitted fact. And this is where the menace to our civilization really lies—in that we are not ashamed as nations and communities, of our backwardness in responding to the "leadings" of the Categorical Imperative. We are undoubtedly a precocious generation. We are "clever"—beyond anything our grandparents can have expected of us, but we are not "good" boys, sad though it is to make the confession. The consequence is that we are unhappy as all bad boys

are—however loudly we may whistle to conceal the truth from ourselves or to save us from despair. We traverse land and sea and even scale the high heavens in our frenzied endeavours to escape from our own shadows, but it avails not. We take our own misery with us and also the consciousness that the body-politic of which each of us is an integral part, is sick from the crown of the head to the soles of the feet. Where shall we find the diagnostic that will make us wise as to our own condition?

Could we go back to Carlyle and learn from him the identity of the understanding and the moral sense, there would be hope of recovery. We might then perceive that the gift of reason and the urge to righteousness are but different parts of the same faculty, and that neither can function freely when separated from the other. The intellect cannot see life clearly and in its true perspectives until the heart feels warmly, nor can the moral life be rich and full until it is enlightened by the intelligence. These two parts of our being were wedded before we knew of them, and perhaps, we may imagine, when the ground-plan of human existence was laid down. We may well say that what God has joined together man must not put asunder. For it is to the inter-working of these two dynamic forces, despite the fact that they have been, so to speak, out of step with each other, that we owe all that is good in our *individual* lives.

Meantime the sickness of the body-politic is approaching its crisis. What can we do to save it? Our immediate concern must be to moralize the relations that hold men together in that system of spontaneous co-operation we call society. It is a great task but not a hopeless one. There may be many and various points at which these relations need the moralizing influence, but most fundamental among them is the "cash-nexus" or economic relation which asserts itself wherever men make collective contact with Mother Nature in their efforts to satisfy their natural desires. On the justice or injustice of that relationship hang the liberties, the opportunities for self-development and the physical and spiritual well-being of each member of the association. What is our conception of a just relationship in this co-partnership in the earning of livings? Surely it is that of access on equal terms for all, to the physical opportunities—the land and its contents, on which or from which all livings must be earned. Given that condition of equality, is it conceivable that one man could oppress another, or that in the exchange of services one man could under-pay another? Is it thinkable that any man wishing to work would be compelled to stand idle?

The condition we have postulated may be realized by the simple process of abolishing all existing taxes, both direct and indirect, and concentrating all public burdens on the value of the land alone, being careful to exclude from taxation anything that is the result of human labour. The simplicity of this prescription for the healing of the nations will almost certainly offend many whom we would gladly have with us in this matter. To such doubters we can only say: "Try it out, then WAIT AND SEE."