

# I

## A UNIVERSE OF LAW

THE world is in a time of crisis: a revolution is in process: to it we must adapt and in it we must participate. The philosophy of life is in rapid change in every field, political, social, economic—even in concepts of justice and of morality—and the premises of our thinking must be those of unchanging principles and not of passing expediency. Soon, we hope, millions of men will be demobilized to find a place in a world of peace, production and life instead of one of war, destruction and death, and for the days to come we must prepare if we would have justice and opportunity for all.

It will be vain to look in these pages for any cut and dried program for the world of tomorrow. To prepare a detailed plan is beyond the capabilities of any man and certainly far beyond the capacity of the writer. The aim is only to outline deep underlying principles upon which we must build for, if foundations are unsound and in defiance of eternal laws, whatever structure we raise will not long endure.

Every man with an ethical outlook on life must believe that to attain real and lasting happiness our lives must be framed on moral law. If one believes that good comes of wrongdoing or that right living brings disaster, the whole structure of morality is gone and we no longer know good from evil. Such may be the philosophies of some peoples but it is not the creed of American Life and, unless we cast

all principle to the winds, we must accept the moral law as supreme.

With war raging everywhere it seems as if the gates of hell had been opened. Some there are who say that this is the will of God, permitted for some inscrutable purpose, but a more reasonable explanation is that we are only reaping as we have sown. To attribute evil to the Almighty is blasphemy and these diabolical things can be said to be His will only in the sense that sin inevitably brings its consequences.

With commendable frankness, Lord Lothian, the late British ambassador, in a speech at Columbia University, fixed a part of the responsibility for the chaos and carnage on the democracies, because "they themselves have failed to live up to the moral standards by which alone free governments can live." True, the greater guilt lies at other doors than ours, but this does not exonerate us and, with no inclination to minimize the greater sins of others, we may well look to our own shortcomings.

To talk of the causes of present conditions may seem like crying over spilled milk, and to talk of peace may seem premature, but these matters cannot be relegated to the distant past nor left to the remote future. Peace must come and we must face the failures which made the last peace only an armed and unstable truce, leaving seed to ripen into the bloody harvest of today. Only on justice and right can we hope to build an enduring peace which will make us secure from both alien aggression and from domestic turmoil.

The great problem of life is essentially simple, however difficult in solving: it is to learn the laws of the universe and to bring our lives into complete accord with eternal principles which to violate means death. Some call these the will of God, while others see them as the laws of nature, but the difference is of terminology and of the limits of

faith. The agnostic puts reliance in blind, impersonal forces, while the believer sees in natural law the methods and plan of a personal Creator. As Cowper puts it, "Nature is but the name for an effect of which the cause is God." However we phrase it, all thoughtful persons, whatever their creed, are united in a certainty that even in this troubled world the universe is one of reason and of law. Results do not just happen by blind chance but follow unchanging laws of cause and effect.

That this is recognized in every-day life is a commonplace upon which life and education are based, for we know that to accomplish anything in a material way we must learn the principles which govern and act accordingly. Can the navigator set his course or know his position at sea in disregard of geography or in complete ignorance of astronomy? Can one design a machine or make the simplest tool with no knowledge of the qualities of the materials in which he works, or expect to see it function in defiance of physics and mechanics? Unless the work of man is framed on obedience to natural law it is labor wasted.

This requires no argument, but we can go further and accept as an axiom that not only is this a universe of law and order but it is also a moral universe in which good follows good and evil produces evil. We do not gather grapes from thorns or figs from thistles, for the essence of good and evil is in their fruits. Seldom can we foresee the consequences of every act: in the involved ramifications of our complex lives near-sighted eyes can not look far ahead, but we may rest assured that only by doing right can we attain our highest goal. These elementary truths find expression in trite adages, ranging from such childhood maxims as, "Be good and you will be happy," or "Honesty is the best policy," to "Crime does not pay." Some there are who have not progressed far enough to learn even this lesson and, re-

jecting all morality and placing faith in brute force alone, they accept as right all that might can accomplish. It is not for them that this is written but for those who accept the moral law as the guiding principle of life, however they may fail in living up to their faith.

When we speak of the war as one of ideologies, is not this the ultimate truth which we seek to express: that it is a contest to determine which shall prevail, selfishness and force or a way of life in which morality is paramount? We see it as a struggle for liberty, for freedom of conscience and respect for individual life, but these aspirations are ours because they are right and because they have origin in principles and beliefs which underlie Christianity and all religions worthy of the name.

It looks as if the society which we once called civilized were heading for perdition. Death and destruction bring ruin and despair to millions, and, to whichever side victory shall come, it will prove but a hollow shell if we lose sight of the greater things for which we fight. Impoverishment, broken lives and homes and demoralization of character will take their toll for generations to come, from conqueror and conquered alike, and if ideals and standards are set at naught, we shall lose though we win.

If the world is governed by law which to defy is death and if its structure is of morality, we must agree that only by conformity to unchanging principles can we prosper. If modern science teaches anything it is the harmony of nature and the universality of her law. Can we imagine that, in all the reason and marvelous co-ordination of things, man is the one exception, put here devoid of principles to work out his salvation in a hit-or-miss world of chance? Did a Power not unmindful of the sparrow's fall create man to blunder along as best he may, with no guiding light? It is inconceivable that man's creation can be so ghastly a joke.

There are those who say that the material world is one thing and our life quite another, for here enters the factor of the human will; but is man's will an exception to universal law? We accept the freedom of the will but must we say that there are no principles by which its action is shaped? Like all else about us, our wills are guided by reason and by law.

But it is said that moral standards are in constant flux, changing from day to day, with no fixity and subject to no inflexible law. Of course, customs and practices are in constant change: the standards of yesterday are overthrown tomorrow, but this is just as true of our conceptions of the material world as of man's moral nature. Vision broadens, knowledge grows, and thinking is recast. Without constant modification of our ways of thought there can be no advance, but it is not eternal laws which change but only our understanding and interpretation of them. Alchemy becomes chemistry; astrology develops into astronomy; the superstitions of the medicine man give way to science, but truth changes not one iota. Philosophers have long disputed whether truth is absolute or relative, but two and two always make four and it is our understanding and our deductions which are relative and not truth itself. Are chemical reactions any different since we ceased the search for the philosopher's stone, or is electricity, harnessed to a thousand uses, a different force from what it was when seen only as thunderbolts hurled by Jove? Is the earth of different shape since men no longer fear sailing over its brink?

With moral law it is precisely the same. Lying, stealing, slander, murder and all that undermines character or wrongs others is, always has been and always will be, wrong, however codes may change. We cannot always say that man sinned when he sought to placate his god by human sacrifice or to bring others to his creed by fire and rack, for, if he

acted according to the light of knowledge and of conscience, ignorance may excuse error. Nevertheless, and however free the individual may have been from moral guilt, such *acts* were wrong. Many a man has taken life in trying to save it, and his procedure was incorrect though he himself, doing his best in rudimentary knowledge according to his conscience, be without guilt. The error lies in faulty premises, incomplete knowledge, and fallacious reasoning and not in moral culpability.

If a better world is to emerge out of man's madness it will come only by learning the laws of life and bringing the structure of society, as well as individual life, into complete harmony with eternal truth. Our method must be that of the scientist or the engineer: study and learn the laws which bind us and give them uncompromising obedience, resisting all call to an expediency which subordinates means to ends and hopes for good through evil. The moral law is as integral a part of natural law as is the material: it is no more to be ignored or defied than the law of gravitation, and we can no more hope to work a great good by doing a little evil than can the scientist hope that the laws of physics and chemistry will be suspended just this once.

With concepts of morality, as of everything else, constantly changing, it is not to specific rules but to broad principles that we must look. They have been phrased in many ways by the seers and philosophers of the ages but seldom more succinctly than by an old Hebrew prophet—"To do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God." Obeying this concise code, we shall not go far wrong but give thought to the precepts which, while equally binding, differ broadly. Note the order in which they are given, for Micah wisely put justice first: it is the first duty of man, but this is not to say that it is the greatest. Rather, it is only a first step to higher things—the foundation upon

which the others must stand—and, until laid in honesty and integrity, a higher morality is impossible.

Upon the nature of justice men have pondered long, but it can easily be defined in a way satisfactory to most minds. It is essentially according to all what is theirs of right, and to grant it to our fellows is the first and least of moral obligations. Between justice and charity—for mercy includes such qualities as generosity, kindness, forgiveness and sympathy—there is a world of difference. Justice is something we have a right to demand and which may properly be enforced, but those higher things, which are “an attribute of God Himself,” are and always must be voluntary. They can only be asked and never claimed as a right. Their virtue lies in the forfeiting of what is rightfully ours in order that we may share with others, and they must always be acts of free volition and uncompelled, for the obligation to give does not predicate a right to take. Is there any merit in submitting to an inescapable force or can one who gives his watch to a gunman take credit for generosity? Are we generous when we pay taxes exacted by the state or is there mercy in failure to wreak vengeance when restrained by force? The duties of benevolence are very real, but they lie wholly within the realm of conscience and it is utterly impossible for human authority to compel them, for compulsion destroys their very nature. They can be enforced only by the violation of the justice which they transcend, and the idea of making others good according to our lights and not theirs is repugnant to the just man.

To give to all protection in their just rights, provided they respect the equal rights of others, is the function of the state. It is the purpose for which the state is instituted, but, going beyond that point, government violates its trust and invades personal liberty. This may seem to circumscribe the place of the state too narrowly, but only by such

a course can freedom of conscience be preserved, although protection must not be too rigidly confined, for it goes beyond the mere defense of police, courts and arms and includes a hundred activities of modern life. We must be protected in our health by water supplies, sewers and the control of infection, and, to enjoy real freedom, we must have many things—streets, highways, communication, transit systems and services so broad and general that it is impossible to allocate their costs to each user. Such undertakings are legitimate, provided they bring benefit to all but not if they violate justice by taking from all to serve a few. Herein lies cogent reason for returning to states and local units operations and responsibilities now usurped by the national government, ever ready to take money from all to spend for restricted groups and localities.

It may be argued that, in times of extremity, necessity knows no law. Men cannot be left to starve and public relief is necessary, but no good comes of stretching the functions of the national government to displace local governments or of any government fulfilling duties which are always personal. John Fiske long ago pointed out that today there are only two sources of public revenue, robbery and pillage, as exemplified in the looting of conquered countries by Germany, and funds collected in taxation from the people. Let us hope that for America at least the former is "out" and that leaves only the funds of our own people to support the state. Of course, men must not be left to starve: the obligation to care for the destitute is imperative, but the choice is of the way in which this duty is to be met, and since charity is exercised only by overruling justice, it is a call of conscience, not to be compelled.

Our programs of public charity, doles, pensions, made jobs and the like, are supported through the impoverishment of our own people. We rob Peter to give to Paul and



thereby we reduce Peter to dependence on others. What the tax collector takes we cannot ourselves give, and public charity deprives us of the means of meeting obligations which must always be personal. That this is an actual condition today is evidenced by experience and the drying up of the sources of charity, increasing dependency and making more difficult every day the financing of religious, charitable and educational institutions. Even aside from this argument, which some may belittle as "theoretical," there is everything to be said for private versus public giving. Can anyone contend that charity is better handled by politicians and bureaucrats than by those conversant with conditions and needs? Selfishness and stupidity are common failings but do office holders rise above other men in generosity or in wisdom? Can we imagine that the overhead is less under political administration than in even the most top-heavy of organized philanthropies? Unquestionably, politicians scatter funds more recklessly when it is the money of others which they disburse and not the earnings of their own sweat and toil, but are public benefactions always made with more regard to needs and deserts than to the advantage of the disbursers, political opportunism or other ulterior motives? Can it be denied that the plums of favor, patronage and privilege are a ready source of corruption? In this "beneficence" lies the root of much that is rotten in democracy, and the only remedy lies in strict adherence of government to its single purpose of justice to all men. Reread the Preamble to the Constitution: in its clear-cut definition of the purposes of government the only clause open to quibbling is that providing for the general welfare of the people, but note the word "general"; it leaves no room for special benefits to groups, classes, sections or individuals.

The only safe course for the state is to hold inflexibly to its single great objective of perfect justice, leaving to the in-

dividual obedience to a higher law which no government has the right to regulate. Ending privilege and giving equal protection to all, there will be little unmerited poverty and few social problems. A modicum of misfortune will always remain but situations arising from natural handicaps and inability to adjust will be met far more efficiently through voluntary action than through political meddling, for we can better afford to carry these problems directly with our own funds than through the intermediary of a political state.

Perhaps a word of qualification should be added. Vengeance and brutality have no place in the ethics of either state or individual and mercy must temper justice. We must not revert to the ancient law of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Penalties for the infraction of man's law may be as lenient as wisdom dictates and the state should no more exact its pound of flesh than should you or I; but the state, in showing clemency, must never impinge on the rights and liberties of its members by giving to some what it takes from others.

All agree that Micah's third precept, to "walk humbly with thy God," concerns only personal life, and compulsion is beyond the power of the state or of other men. In America, matters of creed and of that religion which is wholly personal are completely divorced from government, and were we to realize that mercy and all that it includes is of similar nature, thinking would be clearer, politics purer and life better.

Ideas of man's relation to his Maker vary according to creed and faith, but the injunction is to walk humbly with *thy* God and not with the god of other men or a god which the state sets up. Even to the agnostic it has meaning, for however short our creed, all rational men must hold in respect forces infinitely greater than themselves. Though we

reduce the Ultimate Cause to nothing more than blind nature, her powers must be faced with a humility begotten of a consciousness of our own finite limitations.

But these words imply belief in a personal God and, in that sense, what do we mean by walking humbly with Him? Is it not a willingness to trust and obey Him, making our wills subservient to His and cultivating the spirit which Christ had in mind when He commended childhood? Can we have the proper relationship to the Almighty if we oppress and wrong His children? Christ yoked love of God with love of our neighbor and was far more concerned with the expression of faith in action than with creed and ritual. Note how the prayer He gave us deals with daily life—the kingdom on earth, the duty of forgiveness, our daily bread, and the temptations which beset us today. Never do we find the substitution of dogma or nebulous theology for the imperative duties of here and now in the teaching of One who said, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these ye have done it unto me." It is the age-old lesson of Abou ben Adhem, and we cannot separate duty to God from duty to man or the whole arch will fall. As mercy must wait upon justice, so obedience to the third precept is conditioned upon compliance with the precepts which precede it.

Concerning prayer, men are of many minds. In every struggle and in every war both sides implore the favor of Almighty God, apparently in the hope that the side which He will take will be determined by the importunity of prayer. A more reasonable position is that of Lincoln, who, in reply to the expression of a hope that God was on the side of the North, replied, in effect, that with that he was not concerned, for God is always on the side of right: his hope was that the Union would always be on God's side. Some there are who see in man an instrument through which

God achieves His ends, and to them prayer becomes a mockery unless we subordinate our wills to His and give ourselves to His service. Have we any right to offer the petition, "Thy will be done," unless we are ourselves ready to do it?

It is strange how many there are who, accepting the parable of the talents, see in it little application to religious thinking. To the study of Shakespeare or Homer they will bring their intellects, but to use these same talents in the study of the Bible or of religion implies to them a lack of faith, and to work to achieve that for which they pray means questioning the omnipotence of God. They will plow and cultivate the ground to procure the bread for which they pray, but to obtain other objectives they refuse to use their God-given brains.

Such inconsistencies have long balked man's progress. They branded Galileo as a sinner; the evolutionists violated the province of God when they sought to understand His methods; the lightning rod and vaccination were attempts to thwart His purposes, and the railroad was a thing of the devil because it was the invention of man and not wrought by divine miracle. Is not the surest way to have our petitions answered, whether by God or by man, to manifest a willingness to help ourselves? Is it not conceivable that prayer is answered more often by giving us strength, faith, vision and will than by the working of a miracle while we sit idly by?

This may seem irrelevant, but the point is that prayer for the coming of the kingdom on earth is futile unless we are willing to labor and to sacrifice to make it a reality. Mental inertia offers a very real barrier to the reshaping of society and the coming of a better order, for some good souls who desire a better world are too sluggish to bring to the solution of our many problems the same intensity of

thought and study which they apply to the fluctuations of the stock market, batting averages, or a game of bridge. With no inclination to question the efficacy of prayer, it may be doubted that it can be of any avail if coupled with a refusal to use the means which the Creator has put within our grasp. Attempts to meet human problems, however rich in emotional fervor, sentiment or impassioned prayer, must be linked with a willingness to think, for thought is the prerequisite to action. Many, distressed by conditions about us, implore both God and man to "do something," while they themselves refuse to do the one thing they can do and that is to give thought to what should be done and how. "There ought to be a law about it," they say, but they give not a thought to the higher law upon which man's ordinances must be based, contributing nothing but lamentations, and, in ignorance and impatience, they often lend aid to expedients which, disregarding principles and common honesty, make matters worse. The words of Henry George, cast in bronze, might well be on the wall of every school and college in the land:

"Whoever, laying aside prejudice and self-interest, will honestly and carefully make up his mind as to the causes and the cure of the social evils that are so apparent, does, in that, the most important thing in his power toward their removal. This primary obligation devolves upon us individually as citizens and as men. Whatever else we may be able to do, this must come first. . . . Social reform is not to be secured by noise and shouting, by complaints and denunciation, by the formation of parties and the making of revolutions, but by the awakening of thought and the progress of ideas. Until there be correct thought, there can be no right action: and when there is correct thought, right action will follow."

Despite glaring realities, man has it in him to make of

this sorry mess something better. The evils are not the fault of the Creator but of men. If we are to remake the world, the first step is to use our brains, and none can hold himself guiltless until he gives his best thought to the problems which beset us. The obligation is a personal one, and sentimental bewailing and crocodile tears are futile, nor does it help to abuse others whose hands are tied by conditions which, in ignorance and indifference, we perpetuate. There is truth in Stevenson's statement: "I have seen wicked men and fools, a great many of both: and I believe they both get paid in the end, but the fools first." One wonders if the fools do not often work more evil than the knaves and that perhaps, when we condemn our fellows, we confuse stupidity with depravity. The error—or should we say the sin?—of ignorance works incalculable harm, and possibly the talent which we most often bury, to our condemnation, is the talent of intellect, even though it be as pitifully limited as was the single piece of money.