Notes on law and order

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THE HOGARTH ESSAYS

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J. A. HOBSON

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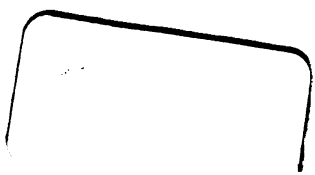

NOTES ON LAW AND ORDER

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NOTES ON LAW AND ORDER

BY

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NOTES ON LAW AND ORDER

CHAPTER I

AGIN' THE GOVERNMENT

WHEN I read in the papers of a convict escaping from Dartmoor, with the warders, police, and the whole neighbourhood hunting him down, why do I want him to evade his hunters, and why am I sorry when he is caught? My feeling (which is also yours) is not due to any opinions I may hold on the subject of crime and punishment. Nor is it, I think, at root, a merely instinctive flash of sympathy with the underdog in an unequal struggle, though that comes nearer to the truth. I even find a feebler and more evanescent sympathy with the burglar, who, single-handed, breaks into a house for pillage. This feeling again is not due to any doubts about the sanctity of property, and it yields to the least reflection.

Some adherents of law and order, indeed, may never have this feeling. But I have. Nor is it completely explained by the natural zest for violent risk-taking that seizes the imagination of those whose quiet life affords no outlet for such risks. This positive and active sympathy with law-breakers is natural for most red-blooded boys, though they are soon taught to repress its utterance. But for mature and sober manhood! Let us look a little closer at our burglar. If he is armed and confronted by an awakened householder, I stand for the latter. But if

the police are after him, and, climbing to the roof, he makes a perilous run for liberty, my heart goes with him, whether he carries the swag with him or leaves it behind. If I sat in court next day adjudicating the case, I should doubtless have adjusted my feelings with better conformity to my regard for the interests of society. But my first feeling still deserves some consideration.

Or take another instance. Why are the police in forceful execution of their duty unpopular with an ordinary crowd of decent working people? This sentiment may not be strong and can easily be turned by tact or courage into one of active support. But it is there, and vigorous police action, even in arrest of law-breakers, easily arouses popular resentment, unless the sort of law-breaking itself has stirred a strong sentiment of reprobation.

We give approval to Law and Order, but we do not like them, or their methods, or their instruments. Take the most general test, our feeling towards Government and officialism. The natural man is "agin'" the Government, at any rate whenever it takes concrete shape in law and administration. And this irrespective of its quality. Nay, though bad government may arouse more impassioned resentment, "good" government evokes no affection. Indeed, there is a dislike of government because it is "good." Efficiency involves "officiousness." Rigorous enforcement of laws, without respect to persons or particular circumstances, is a cold-blooded justice which offends our feeling of humanity. Take India. The dislike of the British Raj is far less due to the fact that it is an expensive enforced rule of foreigners than that it is orderly, impersonal, implacable, inhuman, even incorruptible. Most Indians would probably prefer a looser, more disorderly, more despotic rule under a Rajah whose present personality and erratic conduct gave human interest to the scene. Just as it is difficult for religion to

survive the loss of a presiding Deity, so political government loses hold of the heart of the people when it divorces itself from personal leadership and becomes Law and Order.

This is no plea for return to personal government, where sovereignty is vested in some autocracy or some decorative head. The scrutiny goes deeper. It is " law and order " itself that the natural man is " up against." He is not an anarchist. He wants some law and some order, but in moderation. Unerring law fails to recognise that to err is human. If " order is Heaven's first law," its second is disorder. That brings us to the root of the complaint against civilisation as it is commonly presented. The arts of civilisation, not politics alone, are engaged in bringing order, security, certainty into the lives of peoples. Standards of mass production put uniformity upon the activities of human beings in their industries, trades, professions—for even the most learned professions and the finest arts come in some degree under this economy of routine production. Standards of living carry the same stamp of uniformity into ever nicer gradings of varieties. Economic progress consists in an ever-increasing refinement of this producer-consumer's order.

Kickers against this standardisation of the economic system, humanists such as Ruskin, Carpenter, Tolstoy, over-reached themselves. They failed clearly to pose the question : How much system, how much standardisation, how much " law and order " is it good to have ?

Reflection upon modern man more and more closely packed in standard cities discloses a crop of disconcerting " problems " which represent the efforts of repressed or thwarted instincts to find expression. Men are not satisfied. There is " unrest." Blind politicians and reformers seek remedies in further measures for insuring minimum standard conditions, under the mistaken notion

that what discontented workers want most is security of living.

The real discontent goes far deeper. What the city man and woman want most is some let-up from the oppressive burden of monotony and routine in the ordinary city life, some risk, chance, and skill in the game of life. "What nonsense," some will say, "risks and chances everywhere abound, the physical and moral life of man is exposed to countless dangers, and as for skill, everyone has his work cut out to steer a prosperous, or safe course through life." And it is true that the chief attraction drawing more and more of the rural population into city life has been the craving for adventure which cities seem to offer. Cities were more dangerous, men lived there shorter and more irregular lives. But that was before city life had been reduced to order and hygiene. Now "relief" from city order has to be sought more and more in drink, drugs, sex dissipation, gambling, and sensational amusements. And reform takes shape more and more in efforts to stop these ventilating shafts for thwarted instincts, or to regulate their operation. Has anyone thought out the human significance of a city life where every "social problem" has been solved, and where good order prevailed among all sorts and conditions of men? Perhaps some answer can be found by means of the facile phrase "sublimation of the instincts"; the natural cravings for risk, adventure, and personal achievement being diverted into innocent or even virtuous channels. Possibly by moral and intellectual equivalents for war, sex, greed, and other crude egoistic impulses we could make "our life sublime"! But are we certain that the rarified atmosphere of such sublimity would satisfy the claims of the animal within us whose instincts suffer this air-change? May it not be necessary to make a compromise on a lower level with the forces of disorder?

How much wiser the Catholic Church with its allow-

ance for revelry than the repressive regularities of Puritanism. "It is sometimes a good thing to give oneself an airing outside the strict diocese of the conscience." How to make proper provision for this margin of disorder in the economy of social life is of prime importance at a time when science conspires with ethics to impress the dominance of physical and moral order. The common human resentment against a prig attests the same economy of righteousness. "A prig is someone who tries to shut up the universe in his black hole of a conscience." [1] It is significant that these problems stand out so conspicuous in that city life which has given its title to "civilisation." Is it possible we may be in danger of carrying "civility" too far? That "polis" may bring too much polish? Art recognises the quality of "roughness" in design and execution. May we not be aiming at too fine a finish in the art of living?

[1] Sheila K. Smith, *Isle of Thorns*, p. 267.

CHAPTER II

THE REVOLT AGAINST REASON

NOT in the practical fields of social and personal conduct alone does the problem of the limitations of Law and Order arise. In the world of philosophy and science, thinkers have been eagerly competing to limit the reign of reason and the competence of logic. In part, psychology has forced their hands, by laying bare the origin of reason as a tool of the animal instincts. As a river can never rise above its source, so reason, however freed from its original servitude to the senses, can never answer the final questions about the nature and purpose of the universe or of man's place in it. Hence we find thinkers so different in the texture of their thinking as Bergson and Vaihinger finding the valid answers to these ultimate questions in the realm of practical experience.

There is "system" or "order" in Nature as in our thinking about Nature—there is possibly *a* system if we could reach it, though we cannot—but there are not departmental systems. Yet pride and a sort of æsthetic craving incessantly impels thinkers to piece together their bits of intellectual order into a completeness and an objectivity they do not possess. This is particularly true of thinking in fields where thought is not closely addressed to what are termed hard facts, *e.g.* history, the mental and social sciences, philosophy.

There is among philosophers a desperate desire to incorporate in a system of thought elements essentially

recalcitrant against system. It is, I think, a last attempt to save the face of formal philosophy. For the admission, that thought and language are in origin and function incapable of doing more than confronting us with a series of irreconcilable positions, implies the renunciation of philosophy's secular boast to place a coping stone upon the edifice of human knowledge.

But the revolt against systems of thought goes further. The disappearance of the hard, self-sufficing specialisms of physics and chemistry, of the division between the organic and inorganic sciences, of the separation of biology from psychology, the interpenetration of the social sciences, all testify to a loosening of the entire thought process. Most of all is this seen in the disposition of the great seminal thinkers of our age to break away from formal scientific presentations in order to use artistic or loose literary devices for the communication of their thought. So humanists like Tolstoy, Shaw, and Anatole France couch their philosophy of life in dramas or in fiction sketches, while Samuel Butler and Havelock Ellis, the most stimulating general thinkers of their age in Britain, have sought even looser methods of expression. The return of the Diary is perhaps the best tribute to the success of the revolt against the arrogance and falsity of over-system. For in these records of passing thoughts and feelings we may hope to escape the temptation to fill out our fragments of personal experience into some excessive pattern of objective truth. The new humour of psychology justifies the suspicions which practical man has always entertained towards the theorist, of presenting his private fancies as systems of authoritative principles. This temptation creeps from theory into practice. A panegyrist of Mr Justice Holmes recently described him as "free from the disposition to substitute his personal prejudices for the constitution of the United States." The advice of the aged scholar to the young

student entering his career of intellectual research, "Take care, my son, lest you find what you are looking for," is a salutary warning. For the desire to discover some hidden truth and to present it in an interesting and elaborate design drives the scholar and the scientist to the most intricate modes of self-deceit in the selection, rejection, and appraisal of evidence and the processes of reasoning they employ, all conducted, they easily persuade themselves, in the dry light of disinterested science. The practical man, doubtless, carries his suspicion of the intellectual life too far, and scholar and scientist feel themselves able to meet contempt with contempt. How should the ignorant appraise the learned? But when the learned themselves recognise the humour of their processes of system-mongering, and return to a simpler intellectual life, the inkling in the practical man's mind becomes illumination. Psychology performs no greater service than in thus turning the light of comedy upon the pretence of Reason to be Master—or even Freeman—in the human household. The main difference between the practical man and the intellectual is that the former doesn't even want to be completely reasonable, while the latter thinks he does but doesn't, and cannot.

This brings us round again to our theme, "How much Law and Order" does man require of Life? The intellectualist will tell us we can never have too much, that beyond the ground he has reduced to order lies a boundless hinterland for further risk and industry in discovery and cultivation. But this does not answer our inquiry, which is addressed to the process or method of the intellectual life. The idea of precise order is too dominant in our intellectual life. It is not enough that we are engaged in extending order and security over wider tracts of life and thought. There still remains Nature's demand for risk and chance and adventure as

desirable on their own account. No doubt every science has its borderland of adventure, but the adventurers are few as compared with the many who spend their time in the intensive cultivation of tracts already well surveyed and broken in. Here, too, civilisation imposes overmuch of safe drudgery and makes too little provision for a dangerous life.

But why, it will be said, this stress on dangerous living? Peace and orderly plenty, with the innumerable little chances and changes of this mortal life, are good enough for us! And as for the intellectual life, science, that introduces ever more exactitude into new fields of knowledge, satisfies all requirements. The answer is that these things do not satisfy. Just as in city life, so in academic life, there remains "the call of the wild"—a breaking away from the reign of law. Perhaps we ought to be satisfied with freedom within the law. But we are not. The demands of the creative intelligence, the urge for life, are not directed merely to conquering new kingdoms, in the sense of imposing order upon them. The human mind and the human body need areas of disorder, of risk, caprice, or undirected activity. I once met a sage who told me that he set aside one day each week in which to reverse all the little regularities of work and personal habits that occupied the other six—so as to preserve his freedom. Perhaps this was what God meant by His seventh day of rest—for He was not really tired. But all such use of holidays is a too mechanical device. What is needed is a free margin of disorder around the order of our lives so as not to take ourselves too exactly. It may be (as Wordsworth points out) that within these margins of free living and free thinking some hidden qualities may find expression. Burke is seldom counted nowadays among the "philosophers." Yet there was deeper "philosophy" in his plea for "the unbought graces of life" in an age of "sophisters, economists,

and calculators." But, perhaps, after all, even this plea for the finer utilities may be an improper concession. It may be better for the unbent mind to play a game of chance as a sacrifice to the Goddess of Unreason.

CHAPTER III

THE NEED FOR LIES

UNLESS people usually spoke the truth to one another society would be impossible. But if they always spoke the truth, it would equally be impossible. Where, then, lies the right economy of truth? The issue is only evaded by distinctions between statements of objective or external facts and statements of private thought or feeling. No doubt it is easier to say what you think about the weather than what you think about the character and conduct of those around you. But there are not a few occasions when we feel justified in concealing or misstating our opinion of the weather. Note that "we feel justified." We hold some lies to be not merely harmless, but useful. There is, indeed, something absurd to us in the posing of an extreme case, such as "If a murderer ask you which road his intended victim has taken," as though some desperate exception were needed to justify the lie. Concealment or misrepresentation has an accepted place in every phase of our social economy, nay, of our personal economy. Would our life be tolerable if we did not try "to put the best face on it" and deceive ourselves as we deceive others? Some persons are franker than others, but all of us are practising deceit from morning to night. So habitual, indeed, has this alloy of falsehood become in every phase of social intercourse, that some are disposed to deny that it is falsehood, on the ground that it does not, in fact, deceive. It is only conventional politeness or good manners! But this is "rationalising" the service of falsehood. These

social amenities are intended to, and do, deceive, though not precisely in the manner and degree a strict interpretation of the words suggests. Falsehood, in a word, is recognised to have a proper place in the rules and respectabilities of life. Yet children are never taught when to tell a lie and what sort of lie. On the contrary, they are commonly taught that they must always tell the truth, irrespective of consequences either to themselves or others. Why is this? Is it because parents and teachers know that it is so much more difficult to get the requisite amount of truth-telling? Anyhow, this early misteaching, by seeking to attach a sense of sin and shame to all lying, causes a large amount of needless misery to sensitive natures, and sometimes impairs for life the acquisition of the requisite facility for falsehood. Most quick, observant children doubtless soon perceive that parents and teachers fail to observe their own prescriptions, but some damaging confusion must remain as the result of the early authoritative imposition of the supreme falsehood, "You must always tell the truth."

Generally, theory lags behind practice, as law behind custom, but in this recognition of the vital necessity of mixing falsehood with truth, philosophy has now gone far, perhaps too far. For all the sciences are seen to make a conscious use of fictions as tools in their pursuit of truths. Not only the physical sciences, with their atoms, forces, causality, etc., but, most of all, the exactest of the sciences, mathematics, derives its exactness from the bold contradictions of its fundamental fictions, as in geometry the lines and points and circles whose definitions are sheer illogic. The moral sciences, economics, politics, ethics, sociology, are recognised to operate throughout by assumptions which are false and contradictory when tested by strict reason. "Free will" in ethics, like "free" competition in economics or "free" contract in politics, is a conscious invention, justified by the claim that,

contrary as it is to the known facts of human conduct, it is useful in the attainment of a social order. So with the numerous analogies and metaphors which figure so prominently in all attempts to put order into mental processes, their virtue is not their truth, but the utility they are held to furnish through blending falsehood with truth. It is not here a matter of anticipating truths and laws by hypothesis with subsequent verification. The scientific fictions are claimed to be deliberate falsehoods, containing this falseness in their very essence, *i.e.* self-contradictory, to be sloughed off when they have done their work in helping the scientific mind to discover truths useful for the furtherance of life. Not merely is fiction thus incorporated in the processes of each science, but the work of generalisation itself contains an element of falsehood, as indeed the once famous battle between nominalism and realism disclosed. Language, and the art of thinking associated with it, are composed of images that deliberately misrepresent the concrete facts of Nature, and, what is more, their values for man depend upon this falsification. So the whole conceptual world—the world as imaged in the mind of man—is an elaborate fiction.

That every one of the representative fine arts falsifies the facts in order to attain that beauty which is a higher truth, is an accepted doctrine of æsthetics. It is for that reason that hard, practical men, and their moralists called Puritans, have condemned art. It was not, as is often held, that they hated beauty on its own account (that is a libel of their enemies), but that they hated falsehood, and could not see the high truths art's falsehood was designed to serve. No doubt their hate was primarily due to what they regarded as the degradation of the spiritual truths of religion by material imagery and sensuous appeals. By a natural extension their ban also fell on these same arts applied to secular uses, for was not theirs a jealous God who brooked no rival in His claims upon

the spare time and interests of man outside the prescribed day's work for livelihood ? What they failed to see was that alike the thought of their theology and its anthropomorphic imagery, the " spiritual truths " for whose purity they fought, were the products of this very faculty of artistic falsification they held to be the enemy. The graven images they expelled from the churches were doubtless more material than those stored in their hearts. But the latter were even falser, because painted in softer stuff, vaguer forms, and looser colours, and if thus rendered more mysterious, were not less but more replete with contradictions. For conscious art, applied to the conception of a spiritual universe, will transcend its false images in some higher harmony (however incomplete), while unconscious art will lose itself in the dogmatic perplexities which it has woven into the false semblance of spiritual verities.

So we perceive that, alike in the arts of conduct, and of thought in science, philosophy, and the fine arts, there emerges the necessity of falsehood to temper truth and help to mould it to the uses of man. Indeed, so fascinating is this justification of the free imagination of man in its revolt against hard law and order, that it is no wonder the showmen of this world of fiction tend in their turn to exaggeration and excess. The presumption still stands in favour of the plain concrete truth of realism. We still do well to ask not " How much ? " but " How little ? " fiction we must employ in the several arts and sciences. Moreover, of fictions may we say with Browning :

" Well, now : there's nothing in nor out o' the world
Good except truth : yet this the Something else,
What's this, then, which proves good yet seems untrue ?
This that I mixed with truth, motives of mine
That quickened, made the inertness malleable.
O ! the gold was not mine. What's your name for this ? "

Are means to the end in fact themselves an end? Is fiction which makes fact alive fact too?

It is natural enough that a poet here should raise an issue which escapes the harder intelligence of the scientist and philosopher. These fictions which serve as emollients in social conduct, helping men to live and work together harmoniously, to build up language, laws, religions, morals, and all social institutions: which mix with the materials and the movements of the artist in his creative work: which furnish direction and tools to the man of science and the philosopher in their tasks of the discovery and ordering of thought—is it just to speak of them as falsehood, because of some internal contradictions they contain? Are the kinds of fact to which they are false pure truths? Or may they rather be regarded as the other side of the so-called truths which are but half-truths without them? Can any stuff be considered as helping to mould and move other stuff towards some new and higher form unless it has some community of nature with that other stuff? Falsehood that was the sheer contrary, or negation, of truth could exert no such influence as is ascribed to it. Matter, mind; body, spirit; truth, falsehood; these, as all other dualisms, are but convenient halts in the upward movement of the mind towards a unity of law and order that can be never reached, but after which we are perpetually striving. One practical point remains, that in every field and level of conduct, individual or social, practical or intellectual, a modicum of lawlessness, disorder, risk taking, falsehood, and illogic belongs to the economy of life. The attempt to deny this and refuse it access because it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to measure this modicum, and to prevent excesses, remains alike for politics and morals, for economics, as for the finer arts and processes of thinking, a conservatism which is literally deadly, for it kills the adventurous spirit of man.

CHAPTER IV

ARMS AND MAN

AS disorder and falsehood have their place in the economy of life and conduct, so has physical force. In the spiral of civilisation this place is one of ever-diminishing importance. In the arts of industry, mind is constantly displacing muscle; new inventions and better organisation continually reduce the quantity even of inorganic energy that goes into a given product. The modern factory, with its automatic machines controlled by a few skilled engineers, has gone very far towards the elimination of human physical force from industry. So have the locomotive engine and the automobile in transport. The absolute ideal is expressed in "Touch the button." But it never is, nor can be, reached. For to the almost negligible force of touching a button or moving a switch must be added a larger reserve force for rare and ever rarer emergencies that call for sudden and considerable effort, not of mind only, but of muscle. If from mechanics we turn to art, we encounter in a more delicate way the same economy. In the fineness of creation or execution, in sculpture, painting, music, the dance, the drama, quality prevails over quantity, the greatest results involving the least expenditure of physical force. And yet, even in the most refined of the arts, the creative work involves at certain times a heavy tax not only upon the nervous but the muscular system—sheer physical strains and stresses.

This is evidently applicable to every ordinary art of conduct. However far we go in economising effort by

custom and routine, some minimum of effort still remains, and there is always the possibility of some break in the routine, some sudden accident that calls for a reserve of force. It is so in driving a horse, in tending a garden, looking after a child, even in reading a book. If you do these things skilfully the effort will be small, and the small emergencies will be easily met. I chose the last example purposely, for in reading a book one seems to have reduced the element of physical force to something like zero. Yet, as one gets older, the double call, that of constant psycho-physical attention and that of sudden concentration, makes the lesson clear. An angry man, tackling a stiff lock with a rusty key, will put out much force and break the key : the wise man will oil the lock and use gentle pressure, but even his gentleness is a matter of degree. My reason for labouring these platitudes is that their wisdom is lost sight of in a really dangerous way by modern idealists in social and political reform. We have educationalists who pretend that the beautiful nature of a child should be permitted to unfold itself quite freely, or that something called guidance can be conducted with no element of physical restraint. Similarly, reaction against ignorant brutality in the care of criminals, lunatics, and defectives has taken shape in quasi-scientific or sentimental treatment professing to rely entirely upon moral influences. Christian Science, Higher Thought, and other doctrines of the absolute control of body by the mind, would expel drugs from therapeutics and scrap all the accepted rules of physical hygiene. There is, of course, nothing novel in these attempts of elevated and ascetic thinkers to ignore and to deny the body and the influences of matter in the conduct of life. They are ever-recurrent manifestations of a spiritual pride in the only animal so foolish as to be ashamed of his ancestry and inheritance.

It may be said that the animal in man is and will remain quite strong enough to take care of its own interests, and to resent successfully any undue attempt at the supremacy of mind in the regulation of conduct. Any over-spiritual animals will be bred out, or otherwise eliminated. But the trouble is that these fantastic excesses of idealism are serious impediments to urgently needed steps of human advance. They provide *reductiones ad absurdum* to every enemy of progress. Let me illustrate from a wider field of human conduct. The greatest single peril to the progress of man, to the safety of civilisation, is war, and the minds of thoughtful men and women are bent upon schemes for getting rid of war. A quite simple proposition, says an absolutist. If there were no arms there could be no war. Let nations, therefore, agree to disarm and to submit all matters of dispute to judicial or arbitral settlement. Courts for international settlement will need no force behind their judgments; the public opinion of the world will suffice. Now it is conceivable that some nations might disarm, if they had full confidence that every likely enemy would obey the award of the court when it went against him. But would all nations have this confidence, and would they be justified in a faith which has the whole of past experience against it? The proposal, therefore, to put no international force behind the international court of justice will simply mean that effective national disarmament will not take place. In order to disarm individuals in a community and to put down group-fighting, public courts of justice are established with the requisite amount of physical force to back public opinion in securing the execution of the courts' decrees. Why should it seem reasonable to put international courts at once upon a higher plane of morals, and to presume moral force capable of dispensing altogether with armed force?

The only result of the absolutist attitude is to render national disarmament impossible. It is at least significant that the militarist sections of every nation stand side by side with extreme pacifists in refusing to put an international force at the disposal of the Court or League of Nations. Force can be made a means of justice. Upon this truth society is built. Force applied selfishly by individuals or sections is bad. Force applied socially by organised society is good. Internationalism simply applies this same economy of force on a higher level. There will be less force used, and it will be used in the cause of justice and not of injustice. National armaments must yield place to international. Public opinion cannot be mobilised so speedily, so strongly, and so wisely as to dispense with an international police. The attempt to do this will simply leave large national armaments in being, and weaken the reliance upon international Court or Council. No reliable peace for the world can be won by a false overestimate of public opinion.

No-force pacifism contains a double error. For how does it check the movement towards disarmament? It relies upon an ultimately false antithesis between physical and moral force. Public opinion, even when in substance sound, and operated in the cause of justice, is often as brutal and as cruel in crushing opposition as the cruder forms of violence it purports to displace. Indeed, any close psychological analysis discloses the facts (1) that public opinion commonly incorporates elements of definitely physical force, and (2) that its appeal to reason and good feeling is driven home by the bludgeon of authority in ways at least as degrading to humanity as the simpler modes of coercion. *Corruptio optimi pessima.* "Yes," it may be replied, "but the public opinion in question will be the enlightened will of all the peoples, informed and nourished by the equity and wisdom of

known and trusted judges." An admirable ideal, gradually approachable! But now? Do the peoples now possess that full faith in the justice and wisdom of foreigners (there's the rub) needed for the present working of this internationalism? Are they sure that they, and all the other nations, will accept and obey the Court or Council on issues which are held to be of vital interest to their safety or honour? If so, the millennium is nearer than I think. Sound courts of justice expressing an international will are not enough. It is upon a reasonable faith in an enlightened, steady, incorruptible public opinion that no-force pacifism must rely for the safety of an unarmed world. Now, does the public opinion even of the educated classes in every, or any, nation satisfy this test? "Not completely," it will be said, "but hold up the banner of the ideal and the rest will advance most rapidly to fulfilment." A possible economy, provided it does not lead its exponents to deny the risk their policy involves. What is that risk? Not the failure of an unarmed world-order to maintain itself. Rather the failure of nations to disarm, because they do not possess the requisite amount of faith in the moral sanction of public opinion for the fulfilment of the decrees of international justice. The fallacy of pacific absolutism will thus be registered in terms of competing national armaments and menaces of war.

There is a single philosophic fallacy underlying all the perfectionist codes. They all mistake the antithetic dualisms of order and disorder, truth and falsehood, spirit and matter, force and reason, for ultimate and absolute distinctions, whereas they are only conveniences for the conduct of life. Couples so intimate in their relations, always found in company, always acting upon one another, may seem to the casual spectator to be quarrelling. But they are of the same flesh and blood, of the same spirit, otherwise you would not find them in such

intimate relations. Perhaps it is an improper sublimation of the fighting instinct which leads so many pacifists to stress and dramatise a conflict between physical and moral force which is nothing but a lovers' quarrel, when seen *sub specie æternitatis*.

CHAPTER V

THE NEED FOR HUMOUR

BERGSON hit upon a serviceable half-truth when he made laughter turn upon the behaviour of a human being as if he were a machine. The scholar, philosopher, or professionalist who brings the severe logic or the formulas of his special branch of learning to bear upon some ordinary situation in practical affairs cuts a ridiculous figure. Why? Because he is essentially unequal to the occasion. He is the exponent of an intellectual routine that must always lag behind the requirements of the present. His weight of learning, logic, procedure, cramp his liberty for handling a new situation in ordinary life. "Mathematics," remarked Oliver Wendell Holmes, "breeds a despotic way of thinking." This applies to every scientist in proportion as his science is "exact." The professor in politics has always been a byword—an essentially comic figure—out of place, bringing into the discussion and settlement of human problems the method and temper appropriate to measurable and reliable material. Even if his specialism falls outside the exact sciences, belonging to the humanities, the burden of precedent, which large acquaintance with the past secretly imposes, quite visibly impairs his agility and willingness to take risks. His truisms tend to conservatism, because they cannot help exaggerating the extent to which history repeats itself. It is to the historian that we look for the most frequent utterance of a false determinism in the judgments that begin "Human nature being what it is" and "The whole course of history teaches us." Pride of intellectual

property constantly impels to this statical view of human conduct. Even great men of science commonly concern themselves over-much with the codification of their laws, neglecting the cutting edge of science in its more hazardous excursions into the hinterlands of knowledge. I have already touched upon the fallacy of system-mongering and the æsthetic and property instincts that impel towards the practice. But here it is the comedy of such procedure that interests us. Great system-mongers, like Comte, Bentham, Spencer, are engaged in being comic upon the largest possible scale, *i.e.* putting the whole creative process of man and the universe under the fetters of formula. They do precisely what Molière's pedant, lawyer, or doctor does when he automatically applies his jargon and treatment to cases where they have no relevance. Our philosopher, scientist, historian are right in holding that the future will resemble the past in large measure. Where they err is in failing to realise that the bit of the future which does not resemble the past is for that very reason the most interesting and important part. It is always the discontinuous, the novel, the breach of the rule, that fastens itself upon us as spectators and actors in the human drama. So far as we are scientists, or can handle the elaborate routine of life by rules of thumb or thought, all goes smoothly. But the variants, the novelties, the cases where experience is dumb, these call for the artist—or the gambler. For if you haven't got the creative instinct with some skilled aptitude for handling the novel, life is for you nothing but a gamble, a game of chance—" just one damned thing after another ! " If you possess this instinct and this aptitude, you may be said to be an artist. For it belongs to the artist to handle new opportunities in a creative way. But what sort of artist ? A Philosopher ? I think not. He has too heavy a hand for the job. Shall we say a Humorist ?

It is a pity that this word has been so narrowed and

degraded from its Elizabethan use that Jonson would scarcely recognise it. And yet perhaps its modern meaning still retains a necessary ingredient for the artist of life. For the true humorist is not the mere spectator some pretend, laughing, however good-naturedly, at the queernesses and follies of the great mundane process. He can take a hand himself in life, and, by virtue of his keenness and imaginative sympathy, help to convert a game of chance into a game of skill. The contemplative attitude of a Montaigne does not fill the rôle. To extract the richest humour out of life, one must experiment as well as observe. Especially must one experiment with oneself, the richest and most reliable material at hand. This explains why, upon the whole, we prefer the title humorist to that of humanist, which to many may seem better accredited to the part. It carries certain qualities of verve and lightness—I had almost said levity—needed for the perception and the handling of novelty and opportunity. The associations of humanism are a little overserious for the art. Knowledge is taken by its devotees a little too gravely. It does not do to be over-steeped in culture. It will hardly leave you spry enough to handle quick, unforeseen occurrences.

If, however, it be felt that a humorist is too much identified with the comic spirit, we may at least insist that humour is the first and most general requisite for the artist in life. Whenever the tension of routine is broken, whenever the unexpected happens, or history fails to repeat itself, anger, fear, admiration, pity, or disgust may overwhelm all other emotions at the spectacle. But where none of these emotions prevails, humour steps in and asserts a reversionary right. The sudden contrast which its discontinuity, its incongruity, presents, the element of surprise, are an assertion of the creative in the phenomenal process, and bring into sympathetic action the creative intelligence in man. Our first reaction to

it is a play of humour which perceives a " happy thought," a quaintness of behaviour, a strange event—something surprising which we must take into account and handle with interest and skill, as lying outside the safer low-grade thought and feeling with which we carry on our routine life. Things that " happen " make us " happy " not merely in the sense that we are interested spectators, but because they take us out of a groove and supply us with the material for free creative activity. To deal with things that " happen " we exercise intelligence, initiative, and ingenuity, and by helping to make things happen, launch ourselves on the creative current of life.

But if things are " happening " all the time, the rush overwhelms us and paralyses intelligent activity. We need, then, a safe, steady background of law and order where happenings are so small as not to count. So once more, by a slightly different road, we return to our prime economy of compromise.

Happiness consists perhaps in a general sense of well-being derived from the smooth rhythm of an orderly life, with occasional swift excursions into fields of adventure where the creative impulse may enjoy itself. This " general sense of well-being " is rooted in social order. The creative impulse is the individual's break away, usually consumed in personal enjoyment, but sometimes sowing seeds of fruitful change within the social order.

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