

International Morality *and the Spirit of Man*

The following excerpts are from a lecture delivered to the Clergy Club of New York in April, 1918, by the late HENRI LAMBERT, Belgian manufacturer and economist. The views expressed are as pertinent today as when voiced by the speaker during the First World War nearly twenty-five years ago. The excerpts, together with the interpolation, are supplied by that veteran Georgist and FREEMAN contributor, Mr. Stephen Bell.

Writing of Henri Lambert, whose acquaintance he made in 1916, Mr. Bell says: "One of his oft-repeated sayings was, 'The nations must cooperate or fight,' and he contended that Trade—Free Trade—was their only effective means of cooperation. He understood George and acknowledged that he was right—that the land question was basic—but he held that mankind would consider no basic reform while the fear of war hung over them, and he continued to preach his *Pax Economica*."

★ MY PROPOSITION is that the securing of peace consists of two elemental and precedent processes: (1) The theoretical determination of the principles of international morality, and (2) The practical observance of these principles in international life.

It has always appeared to me to be an extraordinary fact, which serves sharply to characterize the materialism or the artificiality, or at any rate the superficiality, of our culture, that this statement—a sort of axiom, which I have not ceased to put forward since the very first months of the war—has scarcely met with anything else than indifference and neglect, if not contempt, on the part of professors, jurists, writers, clergymen, statesmen, and also pacifists, who, though they may be the best meaning people on earth, have shown themselves generally to be mere sentimental and often weak-minded ideologists.

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(Here followed a keen analysis of the futility of the plan of these "leaders of thought" for disarmament, freedom of the seas, international tribunals to bring about international harmony, national self determination, leagues of nations to enforce peace, "international governments" or "super-national councils," to kindle international love through action of the churches. The speaker poured his especial scorn upon those who busied

themselves with ameliorizations of "the laws of civilized warfare," which he called the rules of "ethical slaughter.")

The tragic mistakes of these "responsible" men is their persistence in the belief and their insistence on the contention that international peace is a state of things that must be "organized" and "enforced." No one among them yet appears to realize that peace can only be "induced," called into being through *natural* conditions, and preserved through adequate means. True peace is harmony. Be it social or international, it can no more be "organized" and "enforced" than can health and happiness. These all are consequences, that follow the removal of causes born of ignorance, which make for discord, for disease, for misery. They are rewards to man for his knowledge and practice of *Truth*, i.e., of the natural laws controlling human life and progress. All evil, all human suffering, are the outcome of stupidity and ignorance—the real "original sin;" for humanity originated, men are born, in ignorance. "Goodness," unless enlightened, is valueless; all good, all lasting enjoyment, is the outcome of intelligence and knowledge, the highest of "virtues." Ignorance is the curse, knowledge the wing, that shall bring humanity to heaven. In this there is an understandable transcendent purpose.

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This problem requires that an answer be first given to the general question: What is morality in intercourse? A satisfactory answer would be: Morality in intercourse is the observance of such rules of Truth and Justice as not only ensure order, progress and peace in human societies, but which also respond to human Spiritual Finalities. But, for the moment, I propose this more concrete definition: Morality is the law of human relations; it is the natural, and, therefore, the divine law of conduct in conformity with which human relations will develop and increasingly advance to the satisfaction of human needs, through mutual service and cooperation. This, I beg to observe, is true for all human needs up to the highest, the spiritual.

But God and Nature have provided man with needs which must first be satisfied, namely, food, clothing, shelter; needs which must be provided for by the raw materials necessary for production. These economic needs of man are his *vital* needs. His economic rights, therefore, are his primary natural rights. His economic relations are, if not his primary, at least his fundamental relations. By the nature of things, expressing the Will of God, morality in economic relations is the fundamental morality.

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No thinker has succeeded better than your stimulating philosopher and poet, Ralph Waldo Emerson, in showing the importance of the economic factor and issue in

the problem of human life. Allow me to read this passage from *Emerson's Journal*:

Trade was always in the world, and indeed, to judge hastily, we might well deem trade to have been the purpose for which the world was created. It is the cause, the support and the object of all government. Without it, men would roam the wilderness alone, and never meet in the kind conventions of social life. Who is he that causes this busy stir, this mighty and laborious accommodation of the world to men's wants? Who is he that plants care like a canker at men's hearts, and furrows their brows with thrifty calculations? That makes money for his instrument, and therewith sets men's passions in ferment and their faculties in action, unites them together in the clamorous streets and arrays them against each other in war. It is Trade, Trade, which is the mover of the nations and the pillar whereon the fortunes of life hang.

All else is subordinate. Tear down, if you will, the temples of Religion, the museums of Art, the laboratories of Science, the libraries of Learning, and the regret excited among mankind would be cold, alas! and faint. A few would be found, a few enthusiasts in secret places, to

mourn over their ruins. But destroy the temples of Trade, your stores, your wharves, your floating castles on the deep; restore to the earth the silver and gold which was dug out thence to serve *his* purposes—and you shall have an outcry from the ends of the earth. Society would stand still, and men return howling to forests and caves, which would now be the grave as they once were the cradle of the human race.

This partial and inordinate success by which this institution of man wears the crown over all others is necessary, for the prosperity of trade is built upon desires and necessities which nourish no distinction among men; which all—the high and the humble, the weak and the strong—can feel, and which must first be answered, before the imprisonment of the mind can be broken and the noble and delicate thoughts can issue out, from which Art and Literature spring. The most enthusiastic philosopher requires to be fed and clothed before he begins his analysis of nature.

Must not this Trade that sustains mankind and makes civilization possible be freed from the restraints we have imposed on it—restraints which are impoverishing the nations and impelling them to mutual destruction?