

The International Morality of Exchange

Herewith is presented the second installment in the "Old Timers Series," which was inaugurated in the January FREEMAN with Louis F. Post's fascinating story of Tom L. Johnson. The current contribution is from Pax Economica, by HENRI LAMBERT, Belgian manufacturer and economist. It was published in November, 1915, but little more than 25 years ago as the calendar measures time, but ages ago in the light of the world-shaking developments which have transpired in the meantime. Here again is displayed the sound economic reasoning and the prophetic insight which characterized much of M. Lambert's writings. Readers will recall an earlier article by the same author which was published in THE FREEMAN for November, 1942.

In this case, as in that, THE FREEMAN is indebted to Mr. Stephen Bell for the material used.

★ HARMONY MUST be the result of Justice, and Justice is inseparable from Truth. Progress of moral conduct is dependent on progress of intellectual truth.

The condition of international peace is international morality. This is dependent, finally, on knowledge of international moral truth, and, secondly, on the practice of that truth. Peoples will find in this practice a two-fold interest: interior prosperity and exterior tranquility. The love of justice and the desire for morality will follow, but they cannot precede, knowledge and practice. Cause and effect will act and react interchangeably, but justice and morality must pass from the "conscious" into the "unconscious." Progress of the sentiment of goodwill can only be consequent on progressive knowledge and increasing practice of truth. It is equally so in international as in social and individual affairs.

Knowledge of the natural economic truths is fundamental to justice, order, morality and security, social and international. It provides the most certain and positive rules of the art of politics. These truths and rules cannot be ignored or even misunderstood with impunity.

War is the inevitable outcome of a state of persistent international "amorality" and insecurity. Peace, in such a state, is but an unstable equilibrium between adverse forces. It is at the mercy of those who consider themselves capable of emerging from the general insecurity by creating self-security through the vanquishing and subjection of others. Such an "amoral peace" is comparable to the "good relations" of cannibals; it also evokes a regime of "international jungleism," for even lions and tigers do not live without a certain mutual respect and, at times, in "peace."

For the last half century European amorality and insecurity, resulting in desire of conquest in some and fear of conquest in others, has manifested itself by militarism put at the service of international economic error and injustice. When truth and justice, making morality, do not rule between states, then force must and will be supreme. When international law is not international truth and justice, there remains but force to overcome and vanquish this false right.

Absolute security and certain peace are conceivable only in so far as no peoples have any interest to desire, and consequently none of them has any reason to fear, conquest. Now, liberty of economic relations (carrying in its train as it does liberty of general intercourse) between two peoples is equivalent to mutual annexation by these two peoples; and liberty of relations between all peoples would be equivalent to reciprocal annexation by all peoples. No people would any longer have an important or even serious interest in vanquishing other peoples and conquering their territories. Given liberty of international economic relations, it is certain that international justice, morality, security and peace would become a positive, practical and normal state of things.

True civilization will be the result of knowledge and will be founded on practice of natural economic truths.

The present war, its abominations, its crimes, its duration—and its sequel, probably greater than the war itself—is not the direct outcome of the spirit of injustice and brigandage in men, but the result of the general ignorance and disregard by people and their leaders of these economic truths. They were bound to be of a decisively capital importance in an epoch which will ever remain characterized by an extraordinary development of industries and a consequent need of corresponding expansion of international commerce.

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The ignorance and stupidity of men have always proved more inexorable and caused them more suffering than their wickedness. It must be so. Men are ordered to become good and wise—aye, to become good because wise! Goodness, unless inspired and guided by wisdom, is incapable of evolving progressive morality. Good cannot be separated from Progress.

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After nineteen centuries of political efforts and Christian preaching, the state of relationship and the mutual attitudes of nations, "civilized and Christian," do not, alike in time of peace as in time of war, differ essentially from those of savage tribes. Everywhere nations are compelled to prepare to fight at any moment for the defense of their chattels, of their soil, of their liberty, even for the preservation of their physical existence. More menacing still seems the future.

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Being, as it is, the natural phenomenon in which lies the origin of "justice," exchange is par excellence the

natural moral phenomenon; hence its extreme importance in respect to internal and international relations; hence its constructive power; hence also, the destructive consequences, without limit, of the attempts to prevent its accomplishment; *hence the fatefulness of Exchange.*

This is explained to those who as political philosophers contemplate the great contemporaneous events, how across the path of humanity there strides a Monster combining the pitilessness of the Sphinx with the frightfulness of the Minotaur. "Thou shalt go no farther," he says. "It is not by an enigma but because of an imperative and categoric dilemma that I bid thee halt. Thou must emerge from thy state of protectionist and militarist ignorance and amorality; thou must recognize the moral truth of peace by free exchange; thou must practice international economic justice. Otherwise thou art condemned to a succession of revolutions and wars which will ultimately lead to barbarism. For thy persistent refusal to adopt the way of justice will be the

proof and measure of thy actual incapacity to further true progress; and therefore there can remain only, for long periods to come, the law of brute triumph and survival of those best fitted for combat and slaughter."

So speaks and will act the Monster.

Yet the rational interpretation of natural moral phenomena, revealing as it does to men the International Morality of Exchange, teaches them the natural necessity of international cooperation, ever more free, consequently ever more just and increasing, as the only, and as the certain, means of rescuing nations from the natural fatefulness of conflicts more and more fearful.

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Is there in the ranks of the world's rulers and leaders a statesman possessed of deserved authority who has the wisdom to see, the courage to proclaim, and the strength to make humanity understand and accept the essential truth of the hour? Of all perils the greatest would be that such a man did not exist!