

Editorial & Publishing Offices :

MACMILLAN & Co., LTD.
ST. MARTIN'S STREET
LONDON, W.C.2



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Vol. 144

SATURDAY, AUGUST 19, 1939

No. 3642

SCIENCE AND MORAL REARMAMENT

SINCE the international crisis of last September public attention has been directed time and again in letters to the Press and in other ways to the need for rearmament in the moral sphere. The movement and the interest in it have undoubtedly sprung from a feeling that a critical point has been reached in the history of our civilization, and that there is danger of disaster unless certain changes in the psychology of nations can be brought about.

The movement was by no means confined to Great Britain. Early in June this year a National Meeting for Moral Rearmament was held in Washington to which addresses were sent, not only by prominent American citizens, but also by members of the House of Lords and of the House of Commons, by British Labour leaders, from Northern Ireland, from Scotland, and from a number of European countries including Switzerland, Holland, Norway, as well as from a number of political and cultural leaders in the Balkans. On this occasion the message from ex-President Hoover was particularly urgent. "The world has come out of confusion before," he wrote, "because some men and women stood solid. . . . They stood firm because they individually held to certain principles of life, of morals, and spiritual values. These are the simple concepts of truth, justice, tolerance, mercy, and respect for the dignity of the common man." The message from Mr. Cordell Hull, the Secretary of State, struck the same note of urgency: "Here in the post-war period there has been a general lowering of standards of conduct—moral, political, social, and economic. International morality has seldom been at a lower ebb. The time is ripe and the need is urgent for a renewal and restoration of the former high standard of conduct of both individuals and governments."

A month later, a World Assembly for Moral Rearmament in the Hollywood Bowl, California, was attended by 30,000 people, and it is estimated that 10,000 were turned away. Twenty-five nations sent representatives, and there was a joint meeting for Chinese and Japanese. Once more a remarkable series of addresses was sent. A manifesto signed by 60,000 British citizens, and messages from artists, labour leaders, educationists, and men of science were among those received. A message signed by seventeen distinguished British men of science runs as follows:

"All who are engaged in the increase of Natural Science are necessarily interested in Moral Rearmament. The effect of the new knowledge which is gained by the study of Nature depends upon the spirit in which it is received and used. Men of good will can make a glorious blessing of it, if they act with wisdom and skill; but ill will and folly can draw from it a curse. Most earnestly, therefore, do we pray as scientists for the success of your coming conference."

This manifesto is to be warmly welcomed as evidence that men of science are alive to the supreme importance of moral issues. We have in these columns frequently directed attention to the lag which exists between the progress of scientific investigation and the ethical advance of mankind. Scientific advance has been more rapid than ethical; indeed there is, as Mr. Cordell Hull said, evidence of actual ethical decline. It is on this account encouraging to note that men of science are not disposed to ignore ethical problems on the specious ground that these lie outside their province. The ethical advance of mankind badly needs speeding up, and men of science are evidently prepared to take their part in applying the necessary stimulus.

We hear much of the increasing specialism of

modern scientific study; yet men of science are citizens and human beings as well as specialists, and as such it is incumbent upon them to seek to put an end to the present confusion. Their duty in this respect is all the clearer on account of the general respect in which their pronouncements are held. No other class of intellectual guide enjoys the same public confidence; neither journalists, bishops, literary men, educationists, nor professional philosophers have the ear of the people to the same extent. Furthermore, men of science are only too well aware that the future development of science is inextricably bound up with the survival of certain moral standards and values, such as disinterested love of truth, toleration for new opinions, and so on. If scientific researches are ever subordinated to utilitarian or propagandist ends, the fate of science will be sealed, for in the cultural sphere segregation is impossible.

It may be that the public is entitled to look to the men of science for something even more fundamental than ethical guidance. Mr. Hoover's message spoke of salvation coming from those who "individually hold to certain principles of life, of morals, and spiritual values". Likewise a message from British educationists to the World Assembly stressed the need to equip people with "simple and absolute moral standards". But principles and standards logically rest upon convictions; they fit into a framework of ideas which form an organic whole. But the trouble now is that this framework has been loosened and some parts of it are missing. Is it possible for men of science to tighten up and repair this framework, or if that is no longer possible, to provide us with a new one? Men of science were in no small degree responsible for weakening the traditional framework; can they not now turn from a destructive to a creative role? It would be a thousand pities if their ever-increasing specialism caused men of science to eschew fundamental problems altogether, and to become mere "intelligences within high walls".

Lately, we have received from Prof. T. D. A. Cockerell, of the University of Colorado, a communication which shows that the mind of at least one man of science is trying to think out some of the implications of new knowledge. "It comes to this," he writes, "mankind has evolved, with all his wonderful powers, and with his emerging sense of right and wrong, and of the value of personality. Especially does it seem incredible to us that the attributes of the human mind should be uniquely

the property of a little organic slime on an infinitesimally small fragment of the matter in the universe. Hence we postulate a greater mind, and wonder about it, as a couple of cells in the body might (were they suitably endowed) wonder whether they were part of something greater, without being able to reach a decision that was capable of demonstration. I cannot bring myself to believe that the human mind is a purely ephemeral and essentially quite unimportant phenomenon in a vast inanimate universe."

Thoughts such as these must have occurred to many scientific workers in their speculative moments, and it would be a pity if all such ideas were dismissed as idle and irrelevant to the work in hand. There is no good reason why men of science should place themselves under a self-denying ordinance whereby all philosophical speculation is taboo. Now that academic metaphysics has become as technical a subject as the higher mathematics, the public have need of a philosophy which conveys some meaning to their minds. There is no call for men of science to dogmatize in the philosophic sphere; which they are not likely to do, being chary of dogmatism in their own. All that the public requires of them is some measure of guidance as to the nature of the universe of which we form a part.

In one respect, as Prof. Levy has pointed out, the man of science has the advantage of the philosopher. Whereas the latter only professes to tell us what the world means, the former tells us what can be done with it. His outlook is therefore practical; and on this account it may actually prove that his philosophical speculations, however unacademic, are nearer the mark than those of his metaphysical colleague. There is much to be said for the view that the human intellect is a tool devised for dealing with our material environment, and is most reliable when it is thus engaged. Divorced from action on the environment, the human intellect turns in on itself and functions as uselessly as a squirrel in a cage, or as the engine of a car before the clutch has been let in.

At the present time there is too much defeatism about with regard to science. Its potentialities have become so great that people are afraid of it. Such defeatism would have small chance of spreading if men of science would take the public into their confidence, and tell them what science can do for men of good will. Those who understand science best know that what we are suffering from is not too much of it but too little.