

CURE FOR MORAL BANKRUPTCY

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LAST MARCH BEFORE the Rotarians in Baguio, I talked about the moral situation then obtaining in our country. I spoke of our apparent moral bankruptcy, as shown by graft in high as well as in law places, — graft in legitimate and illegitimate pursuits. I talked of the alarming increase of criminality, especially here in Manila, — of murders for a handful of pesos, of child gangsters and educated swindlers, of dishonest contractors, unfaithful guards, approachable managers and bribable public servants. Today, the moral situation of the nation still remains alarming. I should like to reach the root of the matter, to find if all this can be blamed on war alone.

Time and again you must have asked yourselves as thoughtful students and keen observers of contemporary scenes and events why criminality is on the increase. Is it because of laxity in the enforcement of law and order, or it because lacking in self-control, some of us just can not help doing the things that we do?

Hardly a day passes that the metropolitan papers do not pub-

lish something politically or socially unsavory, something that makes the man in the street wonder if our society has not lost its moorings and is now drifting toward the maelstrom of perdition. You too must have wondered why the spirit of greed for luxury and lavish living that craved satisfaction even at the expense of all conscience and all honor is so predominant nowadays.

What can be the reason? Has anything gone wrong with us as a people? Have our moral values been debased, as some quarters charged beyond redemption, or has our sense of them been dulled to the point of insensibility?

If we answer in the affirmative, —and there are those who would, though qualifiedly — other questions logically suggest themselves: What has caused such a sudden and radical change in our concept of right and wrong, honesty and dishonesty, and in our attitude toward crime and the criminal? Is the war entirely responsible for it?

Let us express the point differently: What has so ruthlessly sapped our moral fiber that we appear to have lost those superb and admirable virtues that distinguished our forbears? Why have we become so materialistic in our views that the finer things of life, those qualities and achievements that make men and nations truly great, have ceased to have any attraction or meaning to us?

I ask these pertinent, if unpleasant and disturbing, questions not in the spirit of flippancy or of criticism. My sole object, as I have stated, is to diagnose with you the symptoms as they appear to us and, if possible to apply some remedy or suggest its application to the authorities concerned.

Education

And the more I ponder over and probe into our present moral disintegration, the more I doubt whether we can blame it all on the war. I am inclined to believe that the present deplorable moral condition of the nation may be traced to our deficient education. It is truly said that the foundation of every state is the education of its youth. When, therefore, the education is defective, the foundation must necessarily be defective too. It was President Quezon who said: "National strength can only be built on character. A nation is nothing more or less than its citizenry. It is the people that make up the nation and, therefore, it can not be stronger than its component parts. Their weakness is its failings, their strength its power."

The trouble with our educational system, before the war and at the present time, is that it is mostly concerned with educating the mind. I believe no education is complete if it only trains the mind but not the heart. Learning, in the mind of an unprincipled man is as dangerous as a dagger in the hands of a maniac. Arithmetic will teach a man to count and compute, but will also make it easier and faster for him to cheat. Reading and writing will enable a person to express his thoughts more clearly and easily,

but will also give him the facility to deceive and beguile his fellowmen. The arts and sciences will make a citizen a more learned man, but they will also equip him more efficiently for evil and wrong doing. Learning therefore, should always advance hand in hand with goodness; for, once goodness is left lagging behind, learning loses its rudder, its guiding hand, and becomes dangerous.

And the most effective, if not the only effective way of instilling goodness in our people is by means of religious instruction. While it is true that "Good Manners and Right Conduct" is a prescribed subject in our schools, I believe that the same is impotent to instill goodness in our youth.

The trouble with the subject, "Good Manners and Right Conduct," is that it is solely and primarily a training of the mind, like all or almost all the subjects in our schools, and not a training of the heart. It gives a student certain mottoes and principles which he is required to memorize and recite in class. But it is a subject that does not appeal or take root in the heart. It adds truisms to the memory, but does not touch the feeling nor mould the conscience.

I believe goodness can never be developed that way. Goodness

does not come merely from the mind, for even the most hardened criminals know, in their minds, that they are doing wrong. Goodness is something that must be bred and developed in the heart and in the conscience. Goodness is that which prevents us from wrongdoing, not only because we know it is wrong, but because we feel it is wrong.

It is this feeling, this inner conscience, that the subject of "Good Manners and Right Conduct" can not reach. Only religion, with the inspiration and faith it excites, can instill real goodness in our youth.

President Frank Sparks of Washash College, Indiana, who has been attracting attention by his innovations in the methods of preparing students for work has made religion a compulsory subject in the freshman year. He was criticized at first, but after a while his bitterest critics had become his staunchest supporters.

In explaining his system of religious instruction, President Sparks said: "We force no doctrine down our students' throats. We merely introduce them to the history of religion, the history of the Bible and the application of Christian principles to our economic, social and political problems."

But, sad to say, the teaching of religion, even along the line followed by President Sparks, is not given in our public and secular schools. So that while our Constitution provides for optional religious instruction in schools, the provision is a dead letter insofar as actual teaching is concerned.

I know that in advocating religious instruction in our schools I am treading on dangerous grounds. I know that there are some who would call me old-fashioned for advocating religious instruction in our public and private schools,—but if to be old-fashioned is to advocate an idea which is rejected merely because it does not sound modern and fashionable, but which I honestly believe is the remedy to extricate our people, our youth especially, from the present apparent bankruptcy in our sense of righteousness and morality, — then let those people call me old-fashioned.

I know that those opposed to religious instruction in our schools may say that there are practical difficulties that would be met in carrying out this idea because of the many different religious groups in the Philippines. It is true that there are many different religious sects in our country but it is also true that the major ones can be counted on the fingers

of one hand. Undoubtedly, there will be difficulties, but we have I believe enough men who are conversant with educational processes who can devise the necessary means to carry this out. Besides, what good work can be accomplished without first surmounting difficulties?

There will be defects, but what is perfect in this world? There will be objections and criticisms, but can we ever achieve anything worthwhile if we let objections and criticisms stop us at every turn? I, therefore appeal to our school authorities and educators to give this matter immediate and serious consideration. For I do not believe we can raise and maintain an enduring structure of national welfare, material though it be upon the shifting foundation of moral decadence. No material rehabilitation lags so far behind. And moral rehabilitation can be accomplished only by actually giving religious instruction in our schools. If we do not give our youth the education that will make them honest, truthful courageous and God-fearing, we may be sure that our men of tomorrow will be found wanting in integrity and moral rectitude, and instead of building a great nation we shall have built a nation unworthy of our martyrs and patriots.