

The Commoner.

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Law.

When God said, "Let there be light," there was light; and that was law. The sun, moon and stars operate according to a law fixed by the Creator of all things. The human body operates on the lines of perfect law and when this law is violated a penalty must be paid. Many men have doubted and disputed the existence of a God, but they have been made to realize that in spite of their disputations and their doubts there are natural laws which can not be violated with impunity. So society must have laws and these laws will exist and be enforced in spite of the protests of those who oppose all law and all government. Those who do not understand the law, and even those who dispute the authority of the law, are willing to take advantage of the law whenever they need protection. When Emma Goldman and her fellow anarchists were placed under arrest they were quick to call for a lawyer and ready to avail themselves of the guarantees of the government, although in doing so they invoked the aid of the government which they had denounced.

While it was law that forbade the anarchists to do evil, it was likewise law that threw about them the safeguards essential to individual liberty. It was law that enabled these people, even in the moment when public passion was stirred to its depths, to escape swift and summary punishment—a punishment which in the absence of proof would have been injustice.

Dr. Johnson said: "Law is the last result of human wisdom acting upon human experience for the benefit of the public." No one has contended that law is perfect; the steady trend of the good men of the world has been, and is, to make upon the law such improvements as are suggested by experience. History is filled with the achievements of men who have organized opposition to governments then existing; but honor is accorded only to those who, while protesting against one form of government or one administration of government, proposed to substitute in its place, not anarchy, but another form of government or another administration complete in its order and in their opinion more likely to be advantageous to the people.

Even our own Declaration of Independence, after stating the ends of government, said "whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to substitute a new government, laying its foundations on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness." This clear right was recognized, not that it would

give to anyone within the confines of civilization the privilege of rejecting all law and combatting all order, but rather that when one form of law or government became destructive of the ends of government, the people, acting through the majority, might change the form of the law, not by the destruction of government but by the substitution of more wholesome laws, better order and a more perfect government.

Society will be benefited if the attention of all is fixed upon the manner in which every safeguard was thrown about the president's assassin. When he fired upon the president, that was anarchy; when the crowd, excited by the assault upon the chief magistrate and justly indignant, sought to destroy the assassin's life, that was anarchy; but when the wounded president said, "Let no one hurt him," that was law. It is not difficult to understand why the impulse of the crowd at Buffalo was to destroy the assassin, yet had his life been taken an injury would have been done to the cause of good government. It was in recognition of this fact that the authorities took every care to save him from violence, and in all the history of the world the cause of good government was never more completely vindicated or the authority of the law better illustrated than in the trial accorded the president's murderer.

The Bar Association of Buffalo realized that this was to be a supreme test of the wisdom and justice of law, and therefore the association asked for the appointment of two of the most eminent lawyers of the community, Judge Titus and Judge Lewis as attorneys for the prisoner. Although the task was a thoroughly distasteful one, the responsibility imposed by the court was accepted by the lawyers and within one week after the president was laid to rest, in spite of excitement and passions, the assassin went to trial surrounded by the protection accorded to every individual under the law. While it is law that requires the life of the president's assassin now that his guilt has been judicially established, it is likewise the law that prevents the conviction of an innocent or irresponsible man. Not only did the court inquire into his act in firing the shot, but it caused an examination to be made by the most eminent physicians to determine whether the prisoner at the bar was sane and, therefore, responsible for the deed.

This display of justice, this zealous care for the rights of the prisoner demonstrates the rectitude of the government and the regard for the wisdom of the very rules which Czolgosz and his colleagues dispute and despise.

It is said that the anarchists who have been defying the authority of society and government also deny the existence of a God. The necessity

for government is recognized in Holy Writ and the constant effort of statesmen who have had at heart the well-being of society has been to make human laws conform as nearly as possible to the laws of nature and of nature's God. The laws of men have been imperfect, and to the end of time the laws of men will lack perfection, but the remedy is not in the destruction of all law but in the remodeling and reforming of existing laws in accordance with the lessons of human experience. Law is all pervasive and its authority includes man, the climax of creation, as well as the smallest atom.

If the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, the recognition of authority and obedience to law come next in the pathway of progress. As centuries pass the human law should more nearly approach toward the perfection of that divine law whose infinite scope the poet describes when he says:

"That very law which molds a tear
And bids it trickle from its source—
That law preserves the earth a sphere
And guides the planets in their course."

No Time For Despair

The editor of THE COMMONER has recently received a letter from a Democrat who, feeling that his efforts have been fruitless, is inclined to hibernate for a while and take no interest in public affairs.

While this is the only letter of the kind received, it probably reflects the feelings of a considerable number of persons who have labored long and earnestly in behalf of reforms without being able to note the progress which they hoped for and had reason to expect. It is not unnatural that a period of enthusiasm and earnestness should be followed by a period of depression and despondency. Even the best of men have sometimes halted and hesitated in the prosecution of a noble cause. Elijah, one of the most courageous of the prophets of the olden time, once became discouraged, but the Lord revived his drooping spirits by showing him that there were thousands who had not "bowed the knee to Baal."

So reformers can take courage today, for although the enemy is even more strongly entrenched than we thought, there are millions who are still loyal to Jeffersonian principles and still interested in reforming the abuses which have grown up under republican rule.

The fight must be continued. Whether the battle be long or short, it is the duty of every citizen to think for himself, form his own convictions, and then stand by his opinion, confident that the right will finally triumph and that truth will ultimately prevail. There is comfort and inspiration in Bryant's "Battle Field" which will be found on another page.