

Mr. Ford's Page

WE ARE told that 60,000 laws were made in this country last year. This seems to be quite a number for one people to bear. But probably the most of them were improvements on old rules, and a considerable proportion of them were probably called into being by the new conditions that have arisen. Most of our so-called laws are only rules which we lay down to facilitate action, like the rules of the road which are based on a knowledge of the acts which most often cause trouble. By establishing such rules we promote safety and ease of progress, we give every man a very definite idea of his rights, we provide a standard by which he may know what to expect from others.

It has become quite fashionable, rather it was a few years ago, to make sport of the laws. Unequal and incomplete laws which lent themselves to the jugglery of lawyers and the evasion of the powers that prey, became the butt of popular ridicule. Sometimes, too, the action of the agencies appointed to administer the law gave rise to the opinion that there was one law for the rich and another for the poor. Or, if not that, then so many more laws into which the rich man could wriggle because he could pay for it, that finally he could tangle justice in its own web and go free.

There are three kinds of laws, and their intention is, each in its degree, to save us from the next higher one, if only we let it.

At the bottom of the ladder is *man-made law*. It is a human product. It is subject to all the fallacies and faults which inhere in human efforts. There probably never was an absolutely perfect human statute.

Still, to confess that does not indicate that human law is worthless. Human law is an attempt to crystallize the fruits of our experience into rules by which others may benefit by our experience without having to pay the price that we had to pay. Men found that certain ways of doing things wrought hardship, injustice and danger. They found that certain lines of conduct terminated in certain conditions. They found that if the community pursued a certain course with reference to social relations or material possessions, certain distressful results ensued. So, instead of running the risk of everybody upsetting the order of life while he was learning by his own mistakes, the community simply made rules in which its experience was embodied and which saved it from a continual suffering of the same kinds of disappointment and pain.

Now, if men do not heed man-made laws, if they escape the first barrier which society itself has reared across false paths, then there is another barrier—they will come in conflict with *economic law*.

Economic law is that law which is written in the nature of things. Not in the nature of the human soul and mind, but only in things. We know very little about it as yet. If we knew very much we could write our knowledge down in man-made laws and so prevent society tumbling headlong every little while over some economic law which will doubtless seem very clear and simple once we discover what it is. Many learned men have composed books on political economy, and many other learned men have composed other books on the same subject to show that the former books were wrong.

This law isn't written in books at all; if it were, we should all know it. It is written in things, and as a matter of fact the world has been too busy getting the things to pay much attention to the law of them. Fundamental in that law is the system of the earth, the seasons. Without sowing, no reaping. Wild sowing, little reaping. Without work, little product. We have compressed part of the law into a saying that "you cannot get something for

nothing." That appears to be one certain rule of economic law. You might evade and befool man-made law, but economic law operates infallibly. But it isn't limitedly personal in its operation. Sometimes a few powerful men violate the law by idle and unproductive speculation, and then a great number of people who did not violate it at all are made to suffer. That is where man-made law will come in again when we know economic law: we shall prevent by law any man doing things the consequences of which will be adverse to people who are innocent of wrongdoing.

If you take it more limitedly still, we may say that a young man may disobey and positively deride his father's advice that he ought to be industrious. Well, he may be able to escape his father's law, but if he isn't industrious the economic law will get him, and it is a great deal harder to deal with.

There is still a higher law which gets all without exception—it is *the moral law*. You may violate man-made law, and no one

be the wiser and, apparently, no one the worse. You may violate economic law and still be carried through by the momentum of society's economic soundness. But the moral law you can never evade. *You cannot even break it!*

That may seem extremely odd, and perhaps untrue. You may say, "The moral law says, 'Thou shalt not lie.' Very well, I here and now deliberately utter a lie. Have I not broken that moral law which you say cannot be broken?"

No, you have not. The law stands there in its eternal integrity. You have not broken it, but you have broken something in yourself against it. In conflict with the moral law all that we can break is ourselves. If we steal, we break some bulwark of self-respect within us—inevitably break it. If we lie, we break some tissue of integrity within us. If we deceive our fellow men, we break down the subtle something that advertises us as trustworthy to those about us. If we are always motivated by narrow selfishness, we ground the living current which connects us in social sympathy with our fellows.

Every virtue we practice is a battery filling us with power, for there is power in straightforwardness. It gives power to the eye, the voice, and to the subtle effluence of personal influence. And everything that is not virtuous, but indirect, unclean and shifty, takes power from the eye and confidence from the voice and steadiness from the purpose; the electric substances which flow from an ill-lived life advertise its low estate.

Many men have escaped man-made law, they have escaped economic law—so far, at least (nobody need be too cocksure about this, for the end of the

test has not come), but no man ever lived without receiving sentence in himself upon every violation of the moral law. It gets us all, for sentence or reward. High or low, none escape. It is god-like in its impartial operation. It cannot be postponed, nor fought to a higher court, nor bribed. No one else can take the sentence for us—the law is there, and no man ever so much as shook it a hair's breadth. It has the final word, and its word is final.

Now, with these things in view, ought not our regard to increase for the purpose of man-made law? Man-made law is an attempt to prevent men going so far as to become liable to the penalties of the higher laws. Eventually the transgressor in every field will be dealt with by some law. Some transgressions are so great that they are dealt with by all three laws at once. But it is safe to say that if all had regard to the experience of society as boiled down into our written statutes, there would be far fewer candidates for the higher and harder degrees of discipline and retribution. Man-made law is really the expression of wiser ones' desire that those who come after should not pay too high a price to learn what might be learned by the experience of others.

MAN is hedged about by law, but law is a guide not a barrier. It does not operate to suppress man but to direct his progress along the only channels in which he can make progress in his present state. Within the limits of law there is room for transgression, and that brings with it a sure retribution. "Sin and punishment grow on the same stem." Man-made law is an attempt to save people from falling into the hands of the higher economic law, which is the law of things, and the still higher moral law, which is the law of life. What men have learned by breaking themselves against the higher laws they have written into their man-made laws, in order that others may not have to pay the same bitter price of knowledge. In this light, man-made law commands our respect.