

Intolerance

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Abstract

Intolerance.—Intolerance is in abundant evidence in every phase of American social life. The existence of a vast secret organization, numbering trillions, which aims at the control of our social, political, and religious life is ample proof. Social science is far enough advanced to indicate the social results which we may expect from such intolerance. Progress is difficult it not impossible in an intolerant society. Intolerance breeds separation, misunderstanding, and hostility between groups. When groups have no opportunity to settle their disagreements by discussion, they are apt to resort to fighting. Intolerance therefore plays a leading part in fostering civic disorders, and especially in fostering revolution. "Repression is the seed of revolution." The particular repression which breeds revolution is the suppression of freedom in intercommunication for the mechanism of intercommunication is the organ of adjustment for conscious social change. Present widespread intolerance threatens to bring on revolution. The remedy is the conversion of our people to the scientific attitude of mind.

Some of you, at least, know that I have long stood for a larger measure of good will in human relations than is expressed by the word "tolerance." But it may well be questioned whether in the present condition of our world it would not be wiser to advocate tolerance in our social life, as a first step, before any higher form of social good will is aimed at. Last year a public session of our Society was devoted to discussing the question of whether or not intolerance is increasing in the United States. While no definite conclusion was reached, all speakers seemed to agree that intolerance was in abundant evidence in almost every phase of American social life. One member of our Society, who had traveled far and wide over the United States to investigate the growth and ramifications of the Ku Klux Klan, sorrowfully said, "I think we must conclude that we are essentially an intolerant people."

I hope that we shall not be forced to reach any such conclusion. However, no student of our social life would deny that there has been, owing to the world-war or other causes, a great growth of many forms of intolerance among our people within the last two decades. In May, 1923, I talked with that veteran publisher, Mr. William Appleton, whom many of you knew and respected. Mr. Appleton, then seventy-eight years of age, had been in intimate contact with public men and public affairs in both England and the United States for more than half a century. I chanced to ask him whether in his long life he had ever known a period of greater intolerance than the present. He thought a moment and then replied, "No, not even during and directly after our Civil War." Then he instanced how two textbooks in American history,

written by eminent historical scholars, had recently been excluded from the public Schools of New York City because they taught that the American Revolution was a part of the general democratic movement among English-speaking peoples.

Of course, the testimony of one man, no matter how wide his experience, amounts to little. But one meets this testimony regarding the intolerance of our time and country on every hand. A prominent public-school teacher from one of the large cities on our Pacific Coast has told me that the really able teachers of that city do not wish to be in the central office for the administration of its schools, because that office can propose nothing progressive in an educational way, especially in the way of social and political education, without being waited upon by representative business men protesting against any innovation. Apparently these business men believe that social and economic education of the children in the schools is fraught with danger.

Similar testimony of intolerance on the part of business men comes from the eminent Boston merchant, Mr. Edward A. Filene. In a recent article¹ Mr. Filene has said: "Over and over again, in organizations of business men, I have seen successful men turn against and label as dangerous one of their fellows who was only reasonably progressive. I have seen such men display an utter inability to distinguish between sane social advance and revolutionary socialism."

But the worst examples of intolerance are to be found, not in our business and industrial world, but in the religious world. The revival of religious bigotry and intolerance in American society is, indeed, one of the most startling and disturbing phenomena of our time. Twenty years ago many of us believed that religious intolerance was rapidly disappearing. The Fundamentalist and kindred movements in the religious world, however, have shown us that we were mistaken. During the past year one of my graduate students investigated the teaching of the social sciences in sixty-two colleges of a prominent Protestant denomination in our southern states. It is perhaps sufficient to say that he discovered that there was little freedom in these colleges, in the teaching of those sciences, when they were tolerated at all. Not only was the pressure of social, political, and economic orthodoxy in evidence, but religious orthodoxy practically forbade the teaching of organic evolution, and hence, of loyalty to modern science. It was with difficulty that these facts were gathered, because members of faculties were loath to talk about conditions in their institutions, and especially about the ban of the church on the teaching of evolution. One teacher, who at first refused to say anything, finally wrote as follows: "All right. This is a graveyard. We are all evolutionists. Isn't it awful? If any member of our faculty is not, I don't know it. Those whose subjects touch evolution are theistic evolutionists ... But we are not fools and do not have it served up to us in the classroom, except when the textbook expresses it." And he added despairingly: "When will this blind antagonism to Christian evolution die out? I hope that it is decreasing, but I fear not."

¹ *Harper's Magazine*, December, 1923.

Surely this is the voice of a soul in prison, as truly as any that we find in the darkest ages of the world's history. Here is a man suffering for conscience's sake as clearly as did any of the heroes of the Renaissance or the Reformation. I am inclined to believe from the facts that have come to me that there are hundreds of such in the colleges of this country.

Nor is intolerance confined to denominational colleges. The evidence published by the American Association of University Professors shows that it is all too frequent in some of our largest and leading universities. Nor is intolerance simply manifested by those in positions of authority. It is sometimes shown by members of the faculty toward one another. It is even more, of course, to be found among the mass of the people who make up the constituency of the institution. Often what is taken to be the intolerance of authorities is, upon investigation, found to be but their response to intolerant public sentiment. This is a matter which directly concerns all of us; not simply in a personal sense, but even more the development of the sciences in which we are interested. Some careful students find that the slow development of the social sciences in our institutions of learning is due, in the main, to a popular intolerance among our people, which is, at bottom, hostile to the scientific investigation of social, political, and economic questions.

If one wished detailed evidence for the existence of widespread popular intolerance at the present time, one would only have to study the rise and phenomenal growth of a vast secret order among us, said to number millions. For this organization, however lofty its pretensions, springs from racial, religious, and political intolerance, and in every community into which it is introduced it feeds intolerance. Here is an intolerant secret organization which aims at nothing less than the control of our political, economic, and religious life. It is unnecessary to say that its very existence is inconsistent with those professions of religious, political, and racial toleration upon which our government was founded.

It is often said in defense of all these manifestations of intolerance that science itself is intolerant; that when truth is discovered, we cannot tolerate error; that science does not tolerate the belief that two and two make five; that the era of toleration is prescientific, and is past or passing. But this is surely a mistake. One has to acknowledge sorrowfully, to be sure, that often men working in the scientific field have shown an extremely intolerant spirit toward views which differed from their own conclusions. But this is not the true spirit of science. On the contrary, the very essence of the scientific spirit is its open-mindedness, and so its tolerance. The scientific spirit is simply the open-minded love of truth. Science exercises no compulsion upon anyone to accept its conclusions, except the compulsion of honesty and intelligence. It simply assembles the evidence, the facts, and invites anyone to judge for himself. If any other conclusion is warranted by the facts, science is willing to accept it. Science exercises no authority to make anyone believe even that two and two are four. It simply points to the experience of life as forbidding any other

conclusion. As Professor Wolfe has ably shown,² the scientific mind is impersonal, skeptical, critical, tolerant, patient, and fearless in facing facts. It is unimpressed by social prestige or authority, or by social conventions. It is honest and disinterested. The popular mind, on the other hand, is credulous, uncritical, impatient, intolerant, fearful of intellectual changes, conventional, and controlled by personal interest. In other words, intolerance springs largely from ignorance and from the lack of a scientific attitude toward social questions.

But it is not my purpose to set forth the psychological causes of intolerance, nor do I wish even to affirm that it is increasing in the United States. It is rather my wish to inquire into the social effects of intolerance. Were our forefathers right in believing that political, economic, religious, and even racial toleration is necessary in a democratic society? Or were they simply under the spell of that worship of the individual, political, and religious liberty which characterized the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries? If we tolerate intolerance, in other words, in any of the important phases of our social life, what effects may we expect? Social science is surely far enough advanced to answer clearly this question.

I would like to point out at the beginning that the essence of social intolerance is to be found in the suppression of the free expression of opinions upon social, political, and economic questions. When people dare no longer communicate their opinions, when they fear to state their grievances, when they are not at liberty to educate one another by free and open discussion, then indeed we have the essence of intolerance; for freedom of thinking, of belief, and of communication is the very essence of personal freedom. Moreover, the studies of sociologists and social psychologists have conclusively demonstrated that the mechanism of intercommunication is the normal means by which a group readjusts its behavior. Through intercommunication it is possible for a stimulus which affects only a few members of the group to be diffused throughout the whole group. Therefore the mechanism of intercommunication in a group functions very much the same as the nervous system functions in the individual. It is an organ of adaptation. If its free working is interfered with, normal readjustment is rendered difficult, if not impossible. Freedom of intercommunication is not therefore so much an individual right as a necessity for a healthy group life; or rather, it is a precious individual right, precisely because it is a necessity for normal social life.

That we may see that this is no mere analogy, let us outline in a few words how intercommunication works to mediate and control the process of readjustment in a human group. Public criticism is a process of discrimination of whatever is wrong or whatever is unadjusted in the habits of a group. In other words, public criticism marks the bad working of some social custom or institution. It discriminates the elements which are working badly, and these discriminations are communicated to the whole group for its judgment. Discussion of the situation then develops in the group. At first this discussion is of a critical nature, but later the discussion, if allowed to proceed

² *Conservatism, Radiscalism, and Scientific Method*, pp. 222 ff.

freely, normally takes a constructive direction. In the discussion many ideas come into competition and are tested out. Wrong ideas have their weaknesses shown, new ideas are stimulated, the useful, as well as the detrimental, elements in the old situation are discriminated, and gradually constructive views get formulated and new policies approved. Thus we have the formation of a group opinion which becomes the basis for a new adjustment in group behavior.

This is the mechanism of conscious social change under normal conditions in a human group. It has characterized all human groups from primitive times, and is slowly perfecting itself at the present time. Probably the chief argument for democracy is that it frees and develops this process of conscious social change through the development of a social consciousness and a public opinion in the whole group. Obviously freedom of intercommunication is fundamental in this process.

If the process of public discussion is to be effective in helping groups to find solutions for their problems, freedom of thought and freedom of speech must be preserved. Where public criticism of social habits and institutions is not tolerated it is evident that their faults cannot be brought to the attention of the group. Tolerance of criticism is therefore the first condition of conscious social change, or rational social adjustment. It is only through such tolerance that there can be in a group the greatest opportunity for the co-operative working of intelligence in the building up of habits, institutions, and policies. Only thus can grievances of individuals and classes be brought to public attention and the richest results of experience brought to bear upon a given social situation. Only thus, accordingly, is there the greatest chance of a wise and rational solution of public problems. It is not an accident, therefore, that those civilized societies which have maintained the best conditions for free intercommunication, free public discussion, and free formation of public opinion have been, on the whole, most progressive, and have shown the most normal, uninterrupted social development. In other words, those societies which have been most tolerant, politically, religiously, industrially, have shown, so far as can be judged by rational standards, the most normal social development.

Let us now look upon the other side, and notice the effects of intolerance of public criticism and of free discussion of public questions upon the life of a group. We shall pass over its effects upon individual character. Suffice to say that it is notorious that an intolerant social atmosphere produces sycophancy, hypocrisy, moral cowardice, and other undesirable traits of character in individuals; for in such an atmosphere the individual cannot remain true to his conscience, intellectually honest, and sincere, but in order to prosper has to become a mere conformist to the order which surrounds him. With these individual effects of social intolerance, however, we are not now concerned, but only with its larger social aspects.

First of all, we have to note that there is little chance for progress in an intolerant group. Progress or change in such a group can only come through the grace of its governing class; and usually a governing class is interested in maintaining conditions as they are. Therefore, a static condition of society is apt to result. But to understand

exactly why this is so, let us look at this matter a little more closely. All changes in a human group, so far as we know, are initiated by variations in the reactions of individuals. In other words, changes start in human groups with variations in feeling, thought, and behavior of individuals. Some of these variations may, of course, be harmful to the group, and for that matter, to the development of the social life of humanity. But when all innovation along a given line tends to be repressed, there is no way of testing out whether the variation is a useful one or not. The experience of mankind has shown, therefore, that the variant individual should be regarded with tolerance by his group; for only the rational consideration of his innovations by the whole group can test out their value. Moreover, modern societies have found that unlikeness in individuals is frequently as valuable as likeness for purposes of division of labor, group organization, and group action. Too great uniformity in individual character, opinion, and behavior is, therefore, not desirable in a civilized society. Moreover, sociologists would agree that the limits of differences which are socially valuable, and so should be tolerated, are much greater than what the popular mind supposes. For these reasons a society which does not tolerate freedom of thought and freedom of expression in individuals is bound not only to become static, but to lessen its efficiency as a group in a number of directions. The surest way to promote social progress, in other words, is to keep social institutions plastic by encouraging within reasonable limits the innovating individual, by keeping open the channels of intercommunication and of public criticism, and by seeing that every new idea and policy has a fair chance to be tested out in the forum of public discussion. On the other hand, the surest way to stop all social progress and insure a static civilization is to discourage the innovating individual, to frown upon public criticism of established institutions, and to close, so far as possible, channels for the spread of new ideas. That the world has approximated this static condition in various times and places the history of the Middle Ages in Europe and of Asiatic civilizations abundantly attests.

Another result of social intolerance is that it tends to divide a group into misunderstanding, hostile classes. Intolerance of any sort bars the way to that sympathetic understanding of individuals and classes which is the first step toward appreciation, socialization, and voluntary co-operation. If we want to assimilate any element into our group, as, for example, the foreign-born, we must maintain an attitude of tolerance toward them; for any intolerance shown them is almost certain to create in them attitudes which will hinder their assimilation. Moreover, intolerance keeps individuals and classes apart and breeds misunderstanding between them. They have no opportunity to talk over their differences, and when men cannot settle their differences by discussion, they are apt to resort to fighting. Intolerance, in other words, tends to breed war within the group and, ultimately, group disruption. I shall return to this point again when I consider the cause of the great civil disorders of our time.

Another result of an intolerant social atmosphere is the effect which it has upon those who are in charge of the machinery of social control of the group, that is, upon officials in church, in state, and in industry. Such officials reflect, often in an exaggerated way, the intolerant spirit of the group which they represent. They

become apprehensive and frightened at the least failure of individuals to conform to the standards which have been set up; hence they inaugurate a policy of repression, which, sooner or later, arouses resentment and resistance in some part of the group. By repression I mean any policy which constantly thwarts the expression of natural impulses and tendencies on the part of individuals. If such thwarting seems natural and inevitable, as when caused by hard conditions of life, by famine, or by public calamity, it is usually endured by the people with patience. This may be true even under a governmental system, which is strongly supported by a tradition that is regarded as more or less sacred, especially when there is comparatively little popular enlightenment. But when institutional repression is conceived of as arbitrary or unnecessary, it arouses resentment and resistance, and in certain elements of the group the attitude of resistance develops until finally the supreme end of life becomes, for these elements, the doing away with the repression. It is in this way that societies often make enemies for themselves. This is especially apt to be the case if expressions against the repressing institution and statements of grievances are not tolerated.

We are now prepared to see the full social effects of intolerance in a dynamic society, such as ours is. As Professor Wolfe has said in effect³, in a static society intolerance and a policy of repression may result merely in submissive conformity, but "in a dynamic state no such policy of suppression can succeed. In the long run it will produce catastrophic revolution in the place of evolutionary readaptation." In other words, in a dynamic society intolerance which results in a policy of repression, if long continued, produces revolution. The reasons for this are clear. A dynamic society is one necessarily in constant readjustment with its environment. The law of its life is change. Such changes, however, as we have seen, can take place only through the initiative of individuals, through free communication of stimuli and ideas throughout the group, and through the free formation of a new group opinion. If the expression of ideas on the part of the individuals in this process is repressed, the machinery of social readjustment is interfered with, and the whole group is apt to be thrown out of equilibrium. While the dissatisfaction at first may be confined to a few individuals, it is bound, sooner or later, to spread to the mass of the group. A policy of repression, in other words, in a dynamic group, destroys the plasticity of the group, and so destroys the basis of its security.

This theory of the origin of social revolutions was perhaps never better expressed than when President Wilson said in one of his public addresses, "Repression is the seed of revolution." It is not too much to say that this pregnant phrase nearly expresses the modern psychological and sociological view. All scientific psychological study of the effects of repression upon the individual has substantiated this theory. Nevertheless, this "repression theory of revolutions," as we may call it, has not received widespread acceptance, probably because it seems to throw the burden of responsibility for causing revolutions upon the conservative and ruling classes. The spokesmen of these classes have often said, on the other hand, that revolutions- are

³ *Conservatism, Radicalism, and Scientific Method*, p. 142.

caused by the false hopes that are awakened among the masses by Utopian thinkers, who present impossible social ideals. Because of these ideals, people become discontented, and this discontent with existing institutions is gradually diffused among the ignorant masses through the force of suggestion and imitation until at last these ignorant masses develop an attitude of revolt. They cite as an example the Russian revolution. It will be noted that this theory assumes that the mass of the people are irrational, and may be made discontented by agitators merely by suggestion and imitation when they have no rational ground for discontent. The theory assumes a force to suggestion and imitation in the social life which critical psychology and sociology do not find that they possess. While it is true that the mass of men have no highly developed rationality, yet on the other hand, men are inert creatures of habit, and rarely manifest discontent, especially in the extreme form of the attitude of revolt, without considerable cause. We have no evidence which warrants the belief that masses of men get discontented over vain imaginings, or can be easily stampeded by suggestions which are not in line with the situation in which they find themselves. Men rarely undertake civil war between classes, any more than war between nations, without considerable incitement to conflict; in other words, without serious grievances. Utopian and radical thinkers do not cause revolutions, but rather voice discontent which already exists. They may further revolutionary movements, but they do not cause them. Such movements are caused by the discontent which naturally arises from the thwarting of human impulses and desires. In other words, the real cause or stimulus which provokes the revolution must be sought always in the system of social control. When that system is immobile, inflexible, and especially when it becomes repressive of free expression on the part of individuals—that is, when it interferes with the free functioning of the process of intercommunication, of group discussion, with the formation of group opinion, and the determination of group policies—it is bound sooner or later to bring about dissatisfaction and revolt in the masses of the people.

All this is dearly illustrated by the case of Russia. So far from the Russian revolution being the work of agitators and of Utopian idealists, the studies of President Masaryk, of Professor Ross, and of many other careful students have shown conclusively that it originated in policies of repression which had continued for over a century. The Russian revolution was destructive and terrible just because the repressions which had preceded it were severe and prolonged. The French Revolution also illustrates, not less clearly, the part which repression plays in causing social explosions. But it would be a mistake to think that such repression and interference with normal social change is always the work of a governing class, or of a small selfish minority. On the contrary, it may sometimes be the work of an intolerant majority. The history of our own country illustrates this. Early in the nineteenth century there was still hope in the United States that the slavery question might be settled peaceably by discussion and by rational public opinion. But after 1830 popular sentiment in our South became intolerant of criticism of the institution of slavery, opposing public discussion of the institution in any way. The result was that the institution remained relatively unchanged, until the Civil War—a war essentially revolutionary in character—swept the institution away. Intolerant public sentiments and beliefs may give rise,

therefore, to policies of repression, and to inflexibility in habits and institutions which may stop normal social development and pave the way to later social disaster. It is perhaps well to remember here that "class interest," both of privileged and unprivileged classes, on account of the tendency of all groups to group egoism, is liable to give rise to intolerance and to attempts to suppress public criticism of class policies and actions whenever it can. Back of this mistaken policy, of course, stands the attitude of intolerance. Social experience seems to show that if those in power, whether they represent a minority or a majority, will seek to keep open the means of understanding and sympathy between classes; if they will keep untrammelled public criticism and discussion of public policies, and all the means of forming rational public opinion and of selecting authorities to carry out the same, there will be little danger of catastrophic revolution being resorted to in any social group.

I have now given my answer to the question as to whether our forefathers were right in believing that political, religious, economic, and racial toleration is necessary in a democratic society. As one of our most careful thinkers on social theory has said, 'in a democratic society "it is probably unlikely, taking everything into consideration, that the quality of tolerance will ever be excessive." All social experience goes to show that a democratic society can have no safety without tolerance; for, as I have already said, when men cannot settle their differences by peaceful discussion, they are apt to resort to fighting. It has been the pride of English-speaking peoples, from the days of Magna Charta to the present, that they have learned to settle their social and political questions by discussion rather than by fighting. But there seems just at present some danger that this great tradition of our democracy may be forgotten. We seem about to lose our faith in open public discussion as a means of settling social, political, and economic disputes. Not only in Europe, but in the United States also, there is evidence of a trend toward thinking that public questions can be settled by force or coercion. Hence, in spite of the fact that modern psychology unites with social science in demonstrating the futility and danger of this method, there has been a growth of popular intolerance which favors repression and coercion as a means of settling problems.

What is the remedy? The one radical remedy for the spirit of intolerance and the dangers with which it threatens us, as Professor Wolfe points out, is the conversion of our people to the scientific attitude. Nothing short of the diffusion of the scientific attitude can free our people from that control by selfish personal and class interests which renders them intolerant toward new ideas and toward every proposed change. The impersonal open-mindedness and intellectual honesty of the scientific spirit is absolutely necessary for a people who undertake to rule themselves through rational public opinion. If we still find evidence at times of a spirit of intolerance among those who profess the scientific attitude, it must be said that this is because they have acquired it only in part, and not toward every phase of life.

It must be acknowledged, however, that tolerance helps the development of the scientific spirit quite as much as the scientific spirit develops tolerance. "What makes a Liberal," Professor Gilbert Murray has said, "is liberality toward new ideas and

toward opponents, readiness to hear reason, and anxiety not to be misled by prejudice, nor to fall back on mere authority or coercion. Surely such liberalism is a long step toward the scientific attitude. The alliance of liberalism and science is, therefore, not an accident. Science, no more than democracy, can afford to tolerate intolerance.

As scientific men, as well as patriotic citizens, we have every reason to oppose intolerance, and to do all we can to promote tolerance. Hardly any of us, I imagine, would deny that the supreme values of human life lie in intelligence, in good will toward our fellow men, and in the good will of others toward us. Intolerance means the negation of all of these values. Tolerance, on the other hand, furthers their realization. We all recognize that tolerance is a means of developing a broader emotional life. Should we not equally recognize that it is indispensable for the development of a truly broad intellectual life, and so for the spread of that scientific attitude among our people which must be the hope of the future?

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