

CRIME AND SOCIAL COWARDICE

BY B. H. SOMERVILLE

THOSE who believe the effect of crime on the character of society to be deep and subtle, and therefore lasting, tend to believe in full punishment. Punishment, admittedly, has at least *some* effect as a deterrent to other men who would commit similar crimes, as well as a deterrent to the criminal himself. Punishment has at least *some* effect in maintaining law and order.

In order to make men comprehend the painfulness, which is to say the evil, of crime more fully, what could possibly be more effectual than letting them learn of many cases—*actual* cases—in which crime meets with punishment of the full severity deserved! Where is the man who has no respect for the painful, the disagreeable! The man who, in some circumstances ignores the painful is merely a man who in those circumstances does not fully comprehend it. Even the man who faces the painful and endures it bravely usually makes no attempt to ignore it. He *knows* his fate, and resigns to it because something in him that is higher than fear of pain holds him. Indeed, how could there otherwise be true bravery at all!

Since the interest of the individual criminal is as nothing compared with the interest of society, the question is not so much, Does punishment deter actual criminals? as it is; Does punishment make society better at heart? When we focus our attention upon the criminals instead of upon the heart of society, we find ourselves attempting to improve society in improving the criminals only, hence failing miserably. Realizing that nothing exists without having influence upon all other things in existence, how can we fail to see that crime and punishment have effect upon the very heart of society—effect separate and distinct from the effect upon the individual criminal!

For instance, when a bandit kills a man who is fearless enough to resist him, the case is far more than that of one mere man's killing another mere man. Were all men really equal—morally, if not

be but a case of the loss of one of society's countless individuals, physically and mentally—the case would, indeed, be simple. It would. But any man with a knowledge of the great difference in moral value among men everywhere sees in such thing more than mere loss in population. He sees as well a loss to morality, a lowering of society's general moral tone. For fearlessness, a decided virtue, has shown itself in some man only to be destroyed in the destruction of the man.

Probably all of us have seen that fearlessness, according as it is extreme—according as it is *great*—tends to bring the individual to destruction. Over the entire period of civilization—in fact, ever since men have learned to look beyond their own immediate struggle for existence, to sacrifice themselves for their race, or for a principle—we may safely presume that the race has been losing its more fearless men. Socrates, Hannibal, Caesar, are a few among the outstanding examples.

Men's fearlessness, often, indeed, saves them. Fearlessness saves men the more often according as it has root somewhere in the man's own interest. And fearlessness, especially if it be of the more self-evident sort, tends to make the man respected all the more. But let us not allow tendencies to become blurred in our minds by special cases, nor principles by exceptions.

Just as New York City now feels an urge to advertise against crime, saying that criminals "can't win," so do the more respectable men feel an urge, for the sake of society, to "advertise" that fearlessness *pays*. And so most respectable men today have come to believe that fearlessness actually pays *the individual*, and pays in a real, material, way. The effect of the tendency of the more fearless to be destroyed upon society's spirit is not a thing to be passed over with a word of hope and a prayer for better things to come. It gives warning that cowardice is growing—that the race is moving toward a cowardly end. Unspeakable, this may be, yet true. The race may boast of its heroes as much as it pleases of its brave men who have voluntarily accepted untimely death; yet these men may be pointed to, not as something gained to the race, but as something lost to it.

Whether or not we believe fearlessness to be inherited in the biological sense, surely we all realize that the higher values, all the way from mere hard work to the highest of self-sacrifice, tend to gravitate together—to be found together to a significant extent. Did not Socrates say the wise man is good? And how long before even

Socrates did men recognize that the higher things have mutual affinity? In the loss of anything high, how much else tends also to be lost?

When fearless men are destroyed we see something else destroyed also, namely the doctrines of these fearless men. Is there a more sure way to destroy any doctrine than to destroy those who put it into practice? All human activity, being intelligent, is based upon principles, upon philosophy of some sort. Whether or not the doer is conscious of it at the time, a philosophy lies behind every deed. Not men's words, but their actions, express their real beliefs, their real principles. The man who really believes in honesty acts honestly. The man who really believes in courtesy acts courteously. The man who really believes in fearlessness acts fearlessly.

Cowardice, sadism, crime—these are close kin. Just as crime is to a great extent cowardice, so it is to a great extent sadism. (Shall society become as a great masochist?) And, are we surprised that criminals delight to hurt other men, not only as to material possessions, but also as to self-respect—the thing which many men even today, value above all material possessions? When they can hold the threat of instant death over their victims, the vast majority of criminals do not hesitate to insult as vigorously and as mortally as their feelings prompt them to do. And if men fail to avenge *mortal* insults, what insults *will* they avenge?

When men hear of their fellows' being insulted without making the least attempt to avenge the insults, they can hardly feel that they themselves have so very much to fear in insulting these men likewise. Whatever else may hold them from insulting these men, fear of these men tends to be greatly reduced. These men have lost somewhat of their *respect*.

Thus does the tendency to insult, rather than to respect, gradually grow. Whether or not it grows at a *cumulative* rate, is a different question—the point is that it *does grow*.

However greatly men may have respected one another in times past, it is difficult to find great respect for one another among men today. And, how can there be true fraternity among men, where true mutual respect is lacking? Well could Bryce, speaking of fraternity, say, "Not even far off do we see her coming shine."

Among men of the more cultured classes we find comparatively few who insult one another in a vile manner. Yet one usually finds quite a number of men from these classes insulted freely when they come in contact with men from the less cultured classes. For every

taxi driver who shoots his passenger in a dispute over the fare there are probably thousands who insult their passenger to the limit. For every case in which a janitor beats a tenant, there are probably thousands of cases in which the tenant draws out of the dispute—deciding to “use discretion” in dealing with that janitor, giving vent to his feelings in saying he “doesn’t see what things are coming to.” (At the present rate of decay in general fearlessness, who, indeed, does “see what things are coming to”?)

Needless to say, there are still many men with great self-respect—many men who have been spared all occasions in which they would have to vindicate their self-respect at the cost of their lives. There are yet more men of great self-respect who have been unthinkingly converted to the doctrines of the “discreet,” and who have therein been protected from the need of vindicating their self-respect. Quakers believe in the doctrine of non-resistance. So do a great many non-Quakers. Yet, of course, where these are recognized as non-resisting persons, they are insulted all the more freely.

Social cowardice grows, then, as the more fearless are eliminated from the race by the more or less criminal. And it grows as the doctrines of these more fearless are supplanted by the doctrines of the “discreet,” of those who would not avenge insults, who would not resist. Whether the doctrines of the fearless survive and the fearless perish, or the doctrines of the fearless perish and the fearless survive, the result for society is the same—society comes to act as a coward.

This conclusion is far from pleasant. Is the world sufficiently fearless really to consider it?

Would we really check social cowardice, however, we may be sure the thing can be done. “Where ever there is a will there is a way”—but there must be a will—a real, *sufficient* will. Let us work toward gaining that will.

Our will to check social cowardice must, if true, express itself in doing away with all leniency toward the criminal, insofar as leniency is the result of any weakness of spirit. For the criminals, far more than any other group, are destroying society’s courage. Where criminals meet with so-called leniency crime increases—gradually, yet steadily. Where crime increases, the more fearless, with their doctrines of fearlessness, are so much the more endangered, so much the more destroyed.

The man who realizes that far-sightedness is more practical than near-sightedness, will not act in a hasty or thoughtless manner. As

long as he sees a more far-reaching way to utilize his efforts toward checking social cowardice, he will not face certain and instantaneous death for a lesser issue. He will ever look ahead, watching, as far as he can, the heart of the thing, working hard and with serious purpose, yet biding his time. He will direct his efforts toward the end that the will to check social cowardice become sufficiently organized therefore sufficiently effective

HEALING MIRACLES OF JESUS

BY JULIUS J. PRICE

FROM even a scant survey of the New Testament, it is quite evident, that miracles occupied an important place in the ministry of Jesus. Whilst the majority of critics discountenance the supernatural miracles attributed to this God-Man, yet there are some who cling most tenaciously to their belief in the truth of his healing miracles.

The author of the article entitled "Jesus" in the *Encyclopaedia Biblica* is inclined to the latter theory, for he says, "The healing ministry judged by critical tests stands on as firm historical ground as the best accredited parts of the teachings." Should we, however, be inclined to accept this theory of miracle healing, we are immediately confronted with the difficulty—that this miraculous healing power cannot be attributed to Jesus alone. For it is an acknowledged fact that amongst the Jews, Hindus, and Mohammedans a sort of supernatural Therapeutics has always been known, for well does Harnack remark: "Nor was it God's messenger alone, but magicians and charlatans as well who were thought to be possessed of some of these miraculous powers."

This power can lay claims to no divine inspiration or religious sanctity and so cannot serve as a criterion of a religious truth or a moral excellence. Therefore the so-called miracles cannot be taken as conclusive proof of Jesus divine mission.