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Free and Responsible People

EVERYONE HAS THE RIGHT to think and act and believe as he will, but also the responsibility to give an accounting sometime, somewhere, for what he chooses to think and believe and do.

The freedom one enjoys in a democratic country like Canada is not a matter of making absolutely free choice, but choice conditioned by a duty to act according to the trust reposed in one by fellow citizens. The foundation of a good nation is the sense of mutuality its people have.

Some pursue liberty in a frantic way, as if liberation from restrictions and laws were the greatest good in life. The legal basis of freedom is obedience to certain social and moral laws: a person may be free and yet under constraint, he can be both disciplined and free. "Doing your own thing" is not necessarily an evidence of freedom: it may be sparked by pride, or a feeling of incapacity to measure up in the customary environment.

The idea of freedom is not an abstraction: we have freedom *from* and freedom *to*. The good society gives its people the opportunity to realize ever greater human and spiritual values. Like other moral virtues, freedom can only be maintained by carrying out its duties.

A list of the liberties enjoyed by citizens of Canada would fill a page of this *Letter*: religious liberty, political liberty, and the civil liberties; personal freedom, freedom of expression, and freedom of assembly and association. Every freedom has its correlative responsibility.

Whatever a person's position in society, labourer or executive, voter or politician, he has a duty to do his best. There are some who feel that if they obey the law they have done all their duty, but duty is not bounded by statutes. The sense of duty covers all cases of right doing where there is no law to compel you to do it.

"Duty is the sublimest word in the language," said Robert E. Lee. "You can never do more than your duty; you should never wish to do less." And Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote in his *Journals*: "Don't tell me to get ready to die. I know not what shall be. The only preparation I can make is by fulfilling my present

duties."

Duty is not a spectral figure, solemn and grim, stalking us and making notes of our delinquency. It is more like a guide, leading us to justify our existence by making the world a little better than we found it. If we had a hundred space platforms orbiting the earth, the human story would still be told in terms of individuals discharging their duty responsibly.

The state of the world

An increase in the number of people who believe that nothing else matters toward progress but mechanization is matched by the number of people who feel helpless in face of the juggernaut of impersonal power that surrounds them. The power of the bomb, the all-knowingness of the computer, and the force of violence affect everyone.

Peace and order and security depend upon the acts of responsible people who reject the idea of mob rule, with its contempt for human life and values. Preservation of the natural resources which are the basis of maintaining life is attained by responsible guardians who are aware of the limited capacity of the earth to produce food and to absorb waste.

The principle of responsibility is not a creed taken from some book of utopian philosophy. In some form or other it is strong in the hearts of all except the most depraved and graceless people; the thoughtless, the ignorant and the indolent.

Assuming responsibility beckons us out of useless dreaming into resolute aim. It is positive, inviting us to make history not by what we are against but by what we are for. It is everyone's responsibility to think of what may be the consequences of the things he does. This is the categorical imperative of duty spelled out by Immanuel Kant: "Act as if the principle by which you act were about to be turned into a universal law of nature."

Duty in society

There are in this world hundreds of things which are right but which cannot be legislated for; things that

will never be done unless someone is prepared to do them for no reward except a feeling that he is contributing what is expected of him to society.

If a person is to walk with his head held high he must make his contribution in duty done, fairness, sympathy and good taste. He may stand aloof from another person or crusade that displeases him; but he should not therefore feel called upon to make life uncomfortable for people who differ from him. We are told by Anne Fremantle in *The Age of Belief* that the Celts so hated the Saxons that they refused to try to convert them, lest they succeed and the Saxons be saved.

Acceptance of social responsibility means among other things not leaving others to do what we should share in doing. The world is so complex that we must inevitably owe much to our neighbours, but as far as possible every person should stand on his own feet.

Noblesse oblige is a beautiful concept. It denotes the moral obligation to display honourable and charitable conduct. Human life depends upon a sense of obligation on the part of those people who are in position to help others. Whether one be a capitalist, a worker or a manager he has this obligation to society.

Entry into the group called "noble" is open to citizens of all classes. It requires only that we possess and practise traits that are common among those who are noble. This brings into being a new sort of aristocracy, made up of men and women from all levels and walks of life: sympathetic, enthusiastic, of clear vision and free thought, dedicated to greatness and bigness of service to mankind.

Where duty leads

The significance of the family as a social unit continues through all changes in the environment, but the obligation of parents remains. The old pattern has disintegrated, and a new system is growing in society. The historical functions of the family are being pared away: economic, educational, religious, recreational, and protective. There remains the least institution-alized: affection.

The relationship is nearer one of friendship than of blood affection, but the demands of duty between parents and children cannot be evaded without loss of training for effective living. Parents are the trustees, obliged to seek and to do the best they can for their children. It is their obligation to see that flushed and blundering youth is not left to stumble on its own mistakes, with nothing to guide them but shocked looks and sentimental talk.

Young people are not exempt from responsibility. They have duties toward their parents and other aging people. The aged provide a problem of national anxiety. Governments, welfare organizations, churches, and the professions are expressing concern.

The problem requires an organized co-operative approach involving governments, health, education, and religious organizations, and labour and economic

agencies. It offers young people an opportunity to show their worth as responsible citizens.

A society is described in terms of collective behaviour, social usages, sanctions, status and sentiments. To have a community, people must work together with common principles and purposes. No one is rich enough, wise enough or safe enough to do without a neighbour.

Increasing pressures

In the last quarter of this century communities have to take into account many features that did not trouble them in the first quarter: the proliferation of services combined with an unprecedented industrial growth; an urban concentration creating many new needs at the municipal level; urgent need to control air and water pollution; to conserve oil, coal and natural gas and find substitutes; to develop low-cost housing, efficient urban transportation, and recreational facilities such as parks, green belts and libraries.

All these involve responsible thought and work. Just as in family life, life in the community requires a mixture of dependence, sympathy, persuasion and compulsion. Those who expect to reap the benefits of community life must undergo the fatigue of supporting it.

It seems to some people much easier not to get involved with others. Why, then, is it said: "It is better to give than to receive?" Will Durant gives one answer in *The Mansions of Philosophy*: "There is more pleasure in giving than in taking, for all taking is submission, and all giving is mastery."

Effective voluntary organizations provide an essential service that is not available through governmental agencies. The chief value of the work of a volunteer is not that he or she works for nothing, but that the volunteer gives something of himself, providing the compassionate, personal, supportive warmth that is lacking in social security programmes.

There are three viewpoints, every one legitimate within its area: that of the professional agency, that of the recipient, and that of the volunteer. The recipient is undoubtedly more efficiently served by persons who are qualified by training. The recipient, however, needs more than competent diagnosis and treatment whether his difficulty arises from physical, mental or economic disorder. Government departments and agencies do not provide what has been called "tender loving care". And, finally, those who give voluntary service are reaping for themselves a great value, because everyone needs the opportunity to express his humanity.

The increase in the size of industrial units has been changing the relationship of management and workers, and the change brings with it a new challenge to the responsibility of the leaders on both sides of industry. The worker is responsible to management to do a good job honestly; the management is responsible to act properly toward workers, the firm, and the public.

Individual responsibility

It would be an error to suppose that only political representatives and business executives are obligated. In a country where all have votes, as we have in Canada, all are trustees. It depends upon the integrity of each one, as voter and worker, how well the powers of those in authority are used so as to benefit all society.

A responsible person, says the dictionary, is a person you can put confidence in. He faces up to the consequences of his actions.

Responsible people are honourable people. Dean Swift defined honour as judging one's own cause as though it were another's. The responsible person is not guided by the answer to the question "What would I like to do?" but "What is the right thing to do?"

A person's responsibility is not compressed within an external code of rules. The laws of the land do not cover nearly all the obligations people have for their own conduct. For example, the "seven deadly sins" listed by Dr. James Stalker in his book of that name are: pride, avarice, luxury, envy, gluttony, anger and sloth. Not one of these is mentioned in the Criminal Code of Canada as a crime.

No individual can count himself out of the duties associated with good living. One danger faced by democracy is what Viscount Bryce, at one time British ambassador at Washington, called "The fatalism of the multitude... a sense of the insignificance of personal effort."

What is needed is not the chivalry of romantic knighthood, but a helping hand, though discharge of responsibility may very well be accomplished in the true spirit of knighthood: rescuing the oppressed, redressing wrongs, abolishing evil customs, and suppressing injustice.

Albert Einstein, called by his biographer "Maker of Universes", declared: "I realize how much my own outer and inner life is built upon the labors of my fellow-men, both living and dead, and how earnestly I must exert myself in order to give in return as much as I have received."

In need of help

Canadians have acquired a good level of living by good means: work and prudent spending. The hard thing is to learn how to use the good things of life properly.

We reached our feeling of adequacy — where all felt needs are met — somewhere not far removed from the consumption levels of a pioneering society, but the sum of pleasures in modern life is much greater, and we are reaching for more. This recalls the order given to Moses: "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, neither shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest." The good things of life are to be shared with others.

Artificial standards of living are based on shifting

definitions of what constitutes a decent livelihood. Good food, good housing, and good education are primary needs, but the radio receiver and the television set are no longer toys for the wealthy but pieces of functional furniture.

Examples of the failure of some citizens to keep up with rising standards may be seen among Canada's native people. The old economy of the Indian and Eskimo people is not valid today. Living off the land is no longer feasible, even if the people were content to live in a pre-industrial way.

Across Canada there are zones of natural goods — forests, plains and mines — and zones of industry, but these divisions do not segregate Canadians into those who have and those who have not. Citizenship obligations transcend such divisions. As Paul MacKendrick wrote in *The Roman Mind at Work*: "Romans at their best believed that no privilege is deserved unless its holders exercise it with due regard for the rights, and due resolve to improve the lot, of the underprivileged."

Hunger is not all that people suffer from. The poor and deprived are not only those who are hungry. They are also those whose level of employability is considered relatively worthless, whose work can be exchanged for only small amounts of money, incapable of meeting the standard of life they see all around them. Living in poverty means that a person has insufficient access to the goods, services and conditions of life which have come to be accepted as basic to a minimum standard of living.

Dian Cohen said in her column on the business page of the *Montreal Star* in March: "There are still children in Canada today who are physically and mentally retarded because they have not eaten properly since they were born. There are still Canadians who will go to bed tonight fully clothed because they are inadequately sheltered."

The Third World

Canada's responsibility does not end with its own people. No state can be completely sovereign in the sense that it is in no way affected by what happens beyond its boundaries. Dr. L. P. Jacks wrote in *My Neighbour the Universe*: "My neighbour is the organized totality of existence. This it is that claims my duty, my service, my love: this it is that I am to love as I love myself."

Many governments have accepted a commitment to help the impoverished nations to free themselves from the bondage of want. Young people especially seem to realize that Canada is not made up of a citizenship separated by some mysterious distinction from the rest of the world. They have a feeling of oneness in human development.

Lester B. Pearson, chairman of the Commission on International Affairs, said: "Concern with the needs of other and poorer nations is the expression of a new and fundamental aspect of the modern age — the

awareness that we live in a village world, that we belong to a world community.”

Many nations were left behind by the technological revolution, and large parts of the world do not yet have knowledge that permits the attainment of a reasonable level of living. They are trying to move from a primitive, preliterate colonial past into an industrialized future with no time for an intermediate present. Their wants are continually expanding as the people come into closer contact with the West.

Some persons object to the use of “underdeveloped” as it is applied to these nations, but the word has no critical implication, meaning simply that modernization lies ahead.

The term “Third World” is now used to describe the group of developing nations, especially of Asia and Africa, that need capital, knowledge, training, agricultural productivity, planning and exports. Aid will do the most good in those countries which are themselves making sustained and disciplined efforts to mobilize their own material, intellectual and moral resources for investment in their own economic future.

It is important that in doing our duty to others we respect their feelings. When helping the under-dog we need to remember that from their point of view that makes us the over-dog, and their pride suffers.

We should speak no soft words for pity’s sake without accompanying action, nor should we display sympathy *for* the people to whom we are in duty bound to give help, but sympathy *with* them. The distinction is seen in an entry in Pepys’ Diary: “Was fain to stay a great while because of the rain, and there borrowed a coat of a man for 6d and so he rode all the way, poor man, without any.”

Living responsibly

What is it to live effectively responsible? It is to establish ourselves in the central undertaking of human life, in mutually fulfilling relationship with fellow humans. We need to remain human. Machines were introduced to be the extension of people’s hands, but men are in danger of becoming an extension of the machine, functional robots, doing even good deeds mechanically.

Human beings are more and more refusing to be regarded as statistics. B. R. Sen, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, said: “What the world needs most today is not merely a wider exchange of material benefits, essential though it is, but also a conscious dedication to the right of man to grow to his full stature, regardless of the place of his birth, the colour of his skin, or of the faiths and beliefs he might cherish.”

“All the high religious — Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, Taoism” — wrote Dr. A. P. Davies in *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, “exalt the same principles and point to love and brotherhood as the path to the good life, both for individuals and for

society.” The responsibility is not to feed the deserving hungry, or the industrious hungry, or the amiable and well-intentioned hungry, but simply “feed the hungry.”

Act with sensibility

Liberty and duty are twinned with right reason, as the angel Michael said to Adam in *Paradise Lost*. Shouldering responsibility does not mean carrying all the world’s problems. The Golden Rule does not prescribe that a person shall take no care for his own interests and his own welfare. The person who wishes to remain free must continue to carry a very substantial load of personal responsibility for his own well-being.

Sir John Lubbock, writer of scientific works, member of parliament and compiler of the first list of *The Hundred Best Books*, said: “We must be careful not to undermine independence in our anxiety to relieve distress. There is always the difficulty that whatever is done for men takes from them a great stimulus to work, and weakens the feeling of independence; all creatures which depend on others tend to become mere parasites.”

People need to be concerned about filling their role, about developing the “let’s do something about it” attitude. Do-Democracy is democracy based on genuine participation through which a person answers positively the questions: “What duty do I owe to my country, to my neighbours, to my friends?” He will thus make history something more than a period to be lived through. He will be actively engaged in making history.

Acceptance of responsibility leads in business to the use of power and authority justly and sympathetically; in society it leads to a co-operative effort to improve the living conditions of all people wherever they live, and in personal life to the greatest fulfilment of an individual’s capacity, large or small as it may be.

In *My Neighbour the Universe* Dr. L. P. Jacks wrote: “The meaning of right and wrong covers a man’s relations to the entire universe and not merely his relations to his brother man in society. A human being has duties to the whole universe in which he finds himself living.

“Of these duties the chief is to get to understand as much of the universe as he can, and then, in the strength of that knowledge, to do his utmost toward making it a *better* universe than it would have been if he had not happened to be born, by creating some bit of new value, though it be only making two blades of grass grow where one grew before, or mending the broken leg of a sparrow — in other words, by bringing to bear all that he knows about the universe on the guidance of his own conduct as a citizen of it.”

To act in that way is to assume responsibility as a free human being, as a Canadian, and as a part of the universe.