

Our Precious Freedom

By Daniel A. Lord, S.J.

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“How youth loves its liberty!” said Father Hall, almost with a sigh. “But, then, so do we all, I guess.”

“Raw-ther,” Dick drawled.

“I do wish,” interjected Sue, “you’d stop using that Oxford accent straight out of Hollywood.”

“Okay, sis. I’ll talk hereafter like a radio announcer with a bad cold introducing a baritone crooner with a nasal obstruction.”

“Liberty,” said the priest, cutting right through the repartee, “is one of the grandest, most dangerous, rarest things in the world.”

Dick and Sue cast each other a look that meant, “I wonder if Dad and Mother have been talking to him.”

“And while I’m almost sure that thus far your rush of liberty to the head has not given you a headache, I’m not so sure it hasn’t been giving someone else the beginnings of heartache.”

Holidays Astray.

“Thanksgiving?” suggested Sue, contritely:

“Mother and dad didn’t seem to think the holidays much of a success.”

“We were having such a great time,” Dick began apologetically, “that I’m afraid we just about forgot Mother and Dad.”

“I wrote mother a little note of apology from school,” said Sue.

“Much to the good,” nodded the priest. “But, well, I’ll be considerably interested in what happens to you the next two years. You’ve unexpectedly been given a surprising lot of liberty. People get it; people take it nowadays. And it makes the good ones better; and it cracks the cheap and shoddy ones all to bits, I don’t think you’ve anything shoddy in your make-up; but I’ll be anxious to see how far liberty and freedom test you and prove the stuff you’re made of.”

“Thanks,” said the twins, in a duet that strongly reminded the priest of the father and mother.

The Thanksgiving Holidays had not been a success, at least not for the family. Their parents had been so proud of the twins’ academic progress that now enabled them to study at a prestigious Catholic Senior High School. But it also meant living away from the family home during school terms. The twins had come home for the holiday but, as Dick had confessed, ‘we just about forgot Mother and Dad’, instead running around with all their friends to so many fun places. It was the Christmas holidays now and the twins had called in to Father Hall’s little presbytery on their way back to the family home for the festive celebrations. Both twins enormously admired Father Hall for

his genuine friendship and lucid intellect. His opinion, on any subject, was an opinion worthy of serious reflection, and was always guaranteed to be offered with heart-felt love.

A Glorious Gift.

“No question about it,” Father Hall said, gesturing with the stem of his pipe, “liberty, freedom, is one of the most glorious gifts that falls into the hands of a man or a woman. Men cherish it with all the strength of their souls. Women love it more than life. Nations rise and fall because of liberty and its abuse.

“Tyrants have tampered with liberty and felt the cold steel of the assassin. Wars have been fought to win it and to hold it. Men who gain it for others rank with the world’s greatest heroes. We love Washington. We make a symbol even of that traditional character, William Tell. We love Uncle Tom for his declaration of soul freedom in the face of his owner, Simon Legree.

“Freedom in all its forms is precious. We honour men who give us freedom from hard labour, like the great inventors; freedom from ignorance, like the great sages and scientists; freedom from pain, like the great physicians.

“Under freedom a nation reaches its most magnificent heights, as the Greeks did at Thermopylae and in their golden era. Freedom can conjure up the marvellous minds that met in our early days as a nation. Men inspired by freedom create great literatures and go leaping off to expand the world’s horizons — through explanation or scientific research. For the sake of freedom men gladly die martyrs’ deaths.

St. Paul Exults.

“And when St. Paul looked at Christianity and contrasted its freedom with the Judaism of his day, petty in its restrictions and fettering men with small, annoying laws he boasted proudly of what he called the liberty of Christ.”

Dick looked interested.

“I’d never thought of that,” he said.

“Oh, yes. St. Paul was tremendously proud of the freedom that Christ had brought to the world — freedom from slavery, from the ugly restrictions of class and race prejudice, from the debt of sin that had stood against mankind, from Jewish tiresome ceremonial and petty, hampering laws, from the bondage of evil. It’s a phrase to roll on the tongue, that expression of St. Paul’s, ‘the liberty of Christ’.”

Apparent Contradictions.

Father Hall himself seemed to roll it with relish, as he looked from the girl to the boy and back.

“And yet,” he continued, after a moment’s pause, “the strangest thing about liberty is the fact that it is bound round and held together by law. The freest man is the man who has deliberately submitted himself to law. Freest nations love and most carefully protect their laws.

“It’s hard to put all this in a phrase, but the freest man is the man who is most bound by law. The freest nation is the one with the most complete system of legal restrictions.”

As the twins looked at each other in puzzled surprise, Father Hall laughed.

“On my word,” he assured them, “I’m not trying to force epigrams or juggle words. I’m just stating one of the strangest and yet most inevitable facts in the world. If I could think of an illustration of the connection between freedom and the observance of law There! I think I’ve got it.”

The Freedom of the Courts.

They all settled down a little deeper in their chairs, and Father Hall looked directly at Sue.

“Sue, do you remember your wild-eyed enthusiasm when for the first time you saw Helen Wills play tennis?”

“Do I?” cried Sue, her eyes glistening. “I was simply mad about her. I’d never seen such grace and ease and freedom of motion, except, perhaps, in Harriet Hocter, the dancer.”

“There, you’ve got it. A great tennis player and a great dancer both had this freedom of motion. Helen Wills, at the service line, up to the net, into the air with the spring of the ball itself; sure strokes, certain placement, and the swift, apparently effortless, movement of a bird.”

“I never wanted to play tennis again,” Sue confessed ruefully. “I felt like an elephant swinging a telegraph pole.”

“Perfect simile,” said her ungallant brother.

Hours of Drill.

“Now, how precisely did Helen Wills get that perfect freedom of movement on the court? How did she come to manifest that careless perfection of skill? By adherence to the laws of tennis and of health. She practised under hard professional masters, who shot the ball at her from every angle. She learned everything her best amateur friends could tell her. She mastered the principles of serve and chop and lob and volley and drive.

“Physicians and trainers taught her the laws of physical training and the care of her health and just how to keep herself fit. That meant doing some difficult things and eliminating a good many pleasant things.

During the tournament season, if she is like men athletes, she gives up late hours, for example, rich food, smoking, even a cocktail.

Experts and ‘Dubs’.

“While other girls went out on the court and smashed the ball around, largely into the backstop or the net, she was carefully studying the laws of the game and of her own physical condition, until they were part of her nature, and she became the controlled embodiment of all the rules of a perfect woman athlete and a perfect tennis player. The other girls, who never knew or cared about the laws, are still the cause of agony to any decent partner.

“And you know a little, I think, about the training through which a dancer goes — the laws of rhythm, poise, movement; the careful study of the hands and feet; the hours of tireless drilling under temperamental ballet masters; the patience and the labour that lie back of the bird-like fluency of a great dancer. No art has more exacting rules. No art makes greater demands upon its followers — care of health, diet for figure, constant rehearsal, the learning of new technique each year, almost every month. The dancer must seem to dance without effort. But back of Harriet Hocter, as back of Pavlova and all the great, lie years of submission to rule and law and stern discipline.

Freedom of Song.

“And I remember, too, the way you both raved after you’d heard Lawrence Tibbett sing. His perfect flexibility of voice, his ease of manner, the breath control he used in “The Glory Road” and the technique that brought his voice from a clean wisp of sound to a great, rolling torrent! And all so apparently effortless. How did he get so that melody rolls off his tongue with less effort than you use singing a popular song?”

“Don’t I wish I knew?” said Dick.

“Well, fundamentally he had a great voice; but so have thousands of people you’ve never heard of and never will. Tibbett mastered and obeyed the laws of voice and music. He stood for hours, months on end, while vocal drillmasters taught him voice control and breathing and placement. He sang scales when his heart longed for Pagliacci. He was taught the care of his throat, the use of his mouth and teeth. Every tiniest law that experienced teachers could give him he mastered and observed. And after all these years of learning the rules and laws of his art, because he knew them and kept using them, he displayed that effortless freedom that makes his singing such a joy.”

Flying Fingers.

“I think I get you,” said Dick.

“And Paderewski and Zez Confrey (to take two extremes) didn’t just sit down to a piano and by a sudden gift from heaven start to play. They practised scales under a teacher who probably cracked their knuckles, and spent hours on end mastering piano technique. They gave up hours, when perhaps the woods or the fields of sport were calling them, to intricate exercises that taught them the laws of execution. They studied harmony and learned how the masters did it.

“Only after years of submission to masters and laws and rules did Paderewski’s fingers run like quicksilver as he played Chopin’s “Minute Waltz” in forty-five seconds, and only after similar discipline did Confrey speed through the intricacies of his own ‘Kitten on the Keys’. When for a second they forgot the laws, they played discords and tied their fingers into knots.

“Thousands of youngsters start music every year in everything from great conservatories to correspondence schools. Most of them are unwilling to study the laws, to train their fingers to an exacting technique, and they end stumbling through ‘chop-sticks’; or, as a friend of mine once remarked, they never let their right hand know what their left hand is doing. They are lawless musicians, and they are terrible.

“But the man who knows the laws and obeys them creates our music and plays it with all the fluent ease of a great pianist.”

Law and Genius.

“I’d always heard,” said Sue, “that genius disregards the rules, and that that is why it is genius.”

“That is the excuse of lazy painters, who won’t be bothered learning to draw, and lazy musicians, who won’t be troubled with the intricate laws of harmony and counterpoint. Geniuses are men who are big enough to create a new set of rules usually more difficult than those that went before.

“They may change or modify the old laws; the new ones they give their art are even more exacting. Tod Sloan, in the world of sport, changed the laws that governed a jockey; but the new way he rode, high on the horse’s withers, was much more difficult and demanded much more riding skill than the

old method of sitting erect in the middle of the horse's back. 'Cannon Ball' Maurice McLoughlin, the 'California Comet', changed the laws of tennis in service; but he changed them from a soft, easily smashed serve to something that seemed to put all the laws of physics on the covers of one tennis ball.

"Debussy changed the laws of standard harmony, but he made music vastly more difficult and complicated. His 'Afternoon of a Faun' is more intricate than any of Beethoven's symphonies and quite as filled with laws. Gershwin did new things to jazz, but he took simple and easy-to-play ragtime and made it law-abiding, intricate, and almost classic in form, requiring the highest musicianship, in his 'Rhapsody in Blue' and his succeeding compositions. Genius doesn't destroy or ignore laws; it simply makes new and mere difficult ones.

Without Law, What?

"Art without laws is ugly and repulsive as the thumpings of a bad musician, the awful daubs of a bad painter, the sad verse of an amateur poet. For that matter, put in the football team someone who has not observed the laws of training and who plays according to his own rules, and what happens?"

The twins laughed delightedly.

"Well, life is an art, and life is a game. And, believe me, it's an art that cannot be practised and a game that cannot be played without a pretty careful knowledge of and adherence to the laws."

Making It Hard.

They were silent for a moment. Sue had discovered on the stool an unopened box of chocolates.

"May I?" she asked, holding them up.

"Of course. I forgot they were there. When I'm smoking my pipe, candy is something I don't even think of."

"Dick?" she asked, holding them out.

"I think I'll take one of Father's cigarettes. But cigarettes are getting so darn effeminate (excusing my model sister) that I'm going to take up candy as more manly."

"Considering how it effects one's health, I think men and women, old and young, but especially the young, should seriously consider avoiding cigarettes, or any tobacco product, as one would avoid the plague. Sorry, Father, but I just can't see why so many women are so easily convinced to take up such a dirty habit," said Sue.

"Yes, you're probably right. But let's think some more about 'laws'. It's interesting to note that all great geniuses, in whatever line, try to see how difficult they can make the laws of their craft. Great painters work for years on a new colour combination or on new and finer laws of perspective. Great poets all insist on writing sonnets, just because the laws of the sonnet are so difficult and so few have fulfilled them perfectly. Great athletes set out to establish new records that will oblige their successors to more rigorous training and more perfect technique.

"Paganini wrote violin numbers so difficult that he hoped nobody but himself would ever sufficiently master the technique of the violin to perform them. He almost succeeded. Pioneers look for new worlds to conquer, more difficult things to do — a spot on the earth where no one has been,

a corner of science that no one has explored. The dullards of the world take the easy paths. The geniuses, when they cannot find hard paths, create them.”

Freedom Through Law.

“There really is no fun in doing things that are easy, is there, Father?” suggested Dick.

“Most real people don’t find their fun that way. And there’s no thrill of accomplishment in knocking off something that anybody else could do.

“Now, here’s what I’m leading to. The freest people in the world are always the ones who live under the completest code of laws. The more civilised a people, the greater its respect for laws and customs.

Lawless.

“I suppose there are really only a few groups who profess to be lawless. Tramps and hoboes are; so are racketeers — almost. But if you skim through Jim Tully’s tramp stories, you find that even the tramp along the railroad tracks is bound by the law of his ‘jungle’, and violation of that law often means death by a razor edge. The racketeer or the gangster, supposedly beyond the law, is bound by the law of his gang. Just let him violate it, and though the police may not touch him, his bullet-riddled body is picked up along some suburban road. A man can’t escape law even by proclaiming himself lawless.

Law-Bound.

“But, as I said, the more civilised the nation and man, the more intricate the laws that bind the man’s life. We in America are justly proud of our freedom. We like to remember that our ancestors fought and died for it. Yet, in the eyes of a Bedouin Arab or a primitive Sioux or Iroquois, we would be living under simply insufferable laws.

“We have laws that regulate everything, from the quality of the baby’s milk to the filing of a last will and testament. We legislate for the position of a postage stamp on an envelope, and the kind of home a man may build in a certain city block. We determine by law the number of hours a man may work, and how many holidays he may have. He can’t pass through the doors of a theatre without paying the law for permission to take an hour off looking at a Mickey Mouse cartoon.

“A lot of the laws are stupid and silly, and they quickly pass into the bone-yard of lost legislation. The majority of the laws continue to surround our lives with a security that the wall of China could not give nor the fortresses of the Old World ensure. They are civilisation’s rampart against the aggressions of savagery and barbarism.

The Horrible Example.

“Now we have to keep reminding ourselves that the simplest laws and the most complex are all either protection or a guide or a stern warning against impending evil, or the crystallised experience of generations put into a sentence. Even such a simple thing as the traffic laws, for example”

“Oh” cried Dick, “let’s take all the traffic laws and the traffic cops with them and hurl them into the sea.”

“Yes?” said Father Hall seriously. “Well, traffic laws are a very good example of what I mean. And there is another set of laws that we might take at the same time. Suppose we consider little Willie, aged sixteen.”

“Little Willie, aged sixteen,” said Dick, “I’m sure, is going to be my pet peeve.”

“Well, then, let’s consider little Mabel, aged sixteen.”

“Willie, if you please,” protested Sue. “We’ll stick to little Willie.”

“Little Willie it shall be. Well, little Willie, aged sixteen, has just graduated from high school and is a thoroughly precocious lad. So for graduation his father presents him with a beautiful canary-coloured car. You’ll note, by the way, that the laws of our state permit sixteen year olds to drive without supervision. It’s a silly law and ought to be changed. But let’s proceed with our little story.”

“Well, well!” Dick interrupted. “Little Willie with a canary-coloured car is worth considering.”

“Even with a seven-passenger Rolls,” commented Sue, “I could live without little Willie.”

Listening With Yawns.

“Now, as Willie has never driven a car, the demonstrator comes to give him his lesson. ‘Here is first, and second, and third,’ says the demonstrator. ‘Here’s your clutch and there’s your brake. Now, always start in low, that is, in first, unless you want to wear out your engine in no time. For the first five hundred miles don’t go faster than thirty miles an hour or you’ll burn out your bearings. Change your oil every five hundred miles, and put distilled water in your battery regularly. After you have ‘run the car in’, as we say, you can take all the low hills in the vicinity in high, but use second to climb hills that are a little steeper; that is what second is for. With decent care your car should last you all through college.’ And that remark shows that he doesn’t know little Willie.

“Willie yawns and says, ‘Stupid rules, made to help the oil stations and give the dealers an alibi for a crook car.’ So he steps on the starter, puts his car into second, and starts off. From that time on he forgets he has a first, even when he has stopped, slanting up a hill. He forces the machine up the sides of the mountains without shifting out of high, no matter how the engine knocks its protests. He drives sixty miles an hour steadily the first day and wonders, why the engine smells oddly. He never changes oil; and because he can’t see the battery he puts it completely out of his mind. Well ___”

Made to be Broken.

“Oh, I see,” said Dick. “Little Willie is really the village idiot.”

“Not at all. He’s only a young man who completely and deliberately disregards the laws. These happen to be engine laws, but that doesn’t keep his car from heading straight for the scrap heap.”

“Intelligent youth,” commented Sue.

“Very. But we’re not yet through with Willie, the Horrible Example. As far as Willie is concerned, traffic laws were made to be broken. He drives through boulevard traffic at fifty-five an hour. A red light is simply his signal to step on it, and when he sees a sign marked ‘No Left Turn,’ he performs a U-turn. *His favourite hunting preserves are the safety zones, and he deliberately cuts in on the left side of standing trolley cars and the right side of moving trucks**. Traffic laws leave Willie cold, and

he knocks them the same way. He thinks they were made for nice old ladies who still drive electric coupes, and for pedestrians interested in the survival of their species.”

*[Editor’s note: This conversation took place in the U.S. of A. where driving on the right side of the street is the norm – it’s the law, in fact.]

Whither Headed?

“Not to anticipate your story, Father,” asked Dick, “does little Willie end up in jail or the family plot in Calvary?”

“On examination of his record the judge was in favour of an asylum. Instead, he gave him a lecture on how traffic laws were made to protect life, to make driving a car easy, safe, and delightful, to preserve the existence of the pedestrian, and to keep the city streets from becoming a jungle where trucks and touring cars roamed wild in search of prey, and where children ventured with faint hope of returning safely to the family fireside. Then he confiscated little Willie’s car and turned him over to the care of his relatives.”

They all laughed.

“Never again shall I speak disrespectfully of traffic laws,” said Dick solemnly.

Riding Through the Red.

But Father Hall became suddenly very serious.

“Unfortunately, the world is full of little Willies today, who ride heedlessly and without regard for consequences, not through the traffic laws and the laws of gasoline engines, but through the laws of God and man. They smash through all the laws of life, caring not in the least for the fact that behind them is a wake of death and destruction, and ahead of them earth’s junk heap and God’s eternal junk pile, called Hell.

“Such a lawbreaker may be a Genghis Khan or a Stalin, a Captain Kidd or a buccaneer of Wall Street. He may be a Don Juan dressed in silks and flourishing a sword, or a Broadway roué in Bond Street tuxedo, whirling a malacca stick. He may be a Nietzsche or a George Bernard Shaw or a Bertrand Russell or a Voltaire or a Zola or the author of the “Arabian Nights”. In his wake are, not the frightened nursemaid with her baby carriage, or the yapping dogs fearing for their tails, or the startled old gentleman tripping on the kerb, but overturned civilisations, corrupted manners, bloody revolutions, contempt for authority and justice, despoiled women, followers who put into terrible practice the principles he has taught, tears and blood and wreckage.

Behind Safe Walls.

“You see, law — God’s law and man’s derived from God — is the only safeguard we have against the beast that dwells in the heart of every man and woman. In law-abiding communities people sleep calmly behind unlocked doors. In communities infested by the lawless, neither high walls, nor massive time locks, nor armed guards, nor efficient police can protect the peaceful citizen against the assaults of those who have set themselves against the law or above it. Freedom and liberty are curtailed. People are not free to leave their houses after dark. Women are not free to walk through quiet streets. Business is not free to expand in confidence. As lawlessness grows, the freedom of the honest citizen diminishes and disappears.

“And, believe me, it is not merely the man who violates the law which can be avenged in a court of justice who destroys the liberty of the world. The impure man makes life and liberty unsafe for women. The tricky business man endangers the property of widows and dependent children.”

Broken Everywhere.

Father Hall paused, refilled and relighted his pipe. The twins were interested, but still somewhat puzzled. Just where was all this leading? They knew the priest never talked without purpose, but his purpose was not as clear as they'd like it to be.

He sensed their slight perplexity and resumed.

“Now, all this,” he said, “would be stupid platitude if it were not for one important fact: The whole world has gone simply mad about liberty and freedom at all cost. It is in wild and unreasonable revolt against law in almost every form. Men refuse to consider that God has a right to command. Of the laws of the State, they obey only those they like or those that don't inconvenience them.

“Children are in open revolt against their parents. The conventions are being smashed right and left, as if they were not the fruit of generations of painful experience. Women resent even the slightest check on their freedom of conduct or dress or manner. Law is laughed at and ridiculed, and the Ten Commandments, the fundamental law of God and nature, are regarded as belonging to the period of the covered wagon, crinoline, and the blush.

Heading for Chaos.

“Sometimes I think that the only power in the world today standing for law is the Catholic Church. And without law there is no freedom; there is only chaos and the crash of man against man. If order vanished from the heavens, Jupiter would go smashing into Mars, and the Milky Way would rush together in a catastrophe that would rock the universe.

“Order is disappearing from earth, laws are being laughed at and openly flouted; and the world is headed right straight for such confusion and disorder and suffering and misery as it has never known before, if you, Dick and Sue, and the thousands of young men and women like you don't realise that you have to earn freedom and deserve liberty. You have to hedge it tight with the careful guard of law.

“You are a savage roaming the prairies if you smash the laws. You are back to barbarism if you demand freedom without being willing to pay the price of freedom, which is respect and reverence for law.”

Rebel Man.

It was seldom that Father Hall spoke with such intense earnestness and feeling. His whole heart and soul seemed to be in his voice, and the twins sat looking at him in rapt attention. When he began again, his voice was lower in pitch but no less warm in intensity.

“Of course, the whole rebellion against law began when Adam decided by being law-breaker to become law-maker. ‘You shall be like gods.’ It goes back a step farther than that, and rings out in Lucifer's “I will not serve,” that flung glorious angels into hell.

“But it started its modern career when Luther rebelled against the Church and set up private interpretation of the Scriptures against the divinely commissioned voice of God's representative.

Immanuel Kant pushed it much further when he made the individual the judge of what is true and false and what is right and wrong.

“Voltaire, however, was the rebel who was most like Lucifer, brilliant in intellect, perverse in will, in love with his own powers and hating God’s laws. Christ, the Church, and all authority he lumped together in a single concentrated loathing.

Against God.

“Even the cleverest of the men who followed him failed to see clearly that by attacking the law of God they were attacking all law. For what possible force has law if there is no Supreme Lawgiver from Whom comes the authority to command, to demand obedience, to know clearly what is good for man and what detrimental, and to give the law His sanction? Men rebelled against the laws of the Church; then against the laws of the nation; then against the laws of nature; and, finally, against the laws of common decency.

Out of a Doll’s House.

“The rebellion started rolling rather slowly, but now it is moving with a terrifying rush. Ibsen’s famous Nora Helmar slammed the door of her husband’s doll’s house behind her and went out asserting the right of a woman to live her own life regardless of duty to home or family or children or her own purity. There is something typically modern about the fact that Ibsen, who created this pioneer of women rebels against law, treated his own wife as if she was little better than a squaw in an Indian’s wigwam.”

“I didn’t know that,” said Sue.

“Well, it’s true. Once when she made a comment about a play he was writing, he refused to speak to her for weeks. No woman had a right even to have a thought about a play. His fictional women were rebels. The women of his immediate family were doormats.”

Dick laughed appreciatively.

“Judging from his pictures, I’m not surprised.”

The Open Door.

“Well, once Nora had opened that door, a perfect army of rebellious women, in fiction, on the stage, in the films, and, regretfully we must admit it, in real life followed her through it. Rebellious heroines have been fashionable. Women made their own laws, lived their own lives, gave their precious love to any chance comer, shut the doors of life in the face of children, regarded the grand career of home-making as something too dull for their minds, which were engrossed in futile competition with men for things not worth having, with reforms that usually nobody wanted, with clubs that talked much about doing nothing, and with the intricacies of bridge and divorce.

Ride Them Down.

“Then came Nietzsche to present as the really moral man the man who trampled the law under foot. His hero, the often cited Superman, drove his warhorse roughshod over his fallen enemies. Laws were for fools. Strong men smashed the laws as giants in their stride, crushed cottages and vineyards and children too young to escape their footfalls.

“Bernard Shaw, picker of other men’s brains, took up the battle cry of Nietzsche, and shouted vociferously: ‘The golden rule is that there is no Golden Rule.’ I have sometimes wondered what the law-loving Christ thought of that.

“Oscar Wilde and Maupassant and Anatole France preached the theory that sin is the action of a truly brave man, and that the rebellious angels are the greatest heroes. The interpreters of Freud and Bertrand Russell and the immoralists and a-moralists taught that sex laws were balls and chains about the feet of an aspiring race. The anarchist in one breath cried out against the Ten Commandments and the sanitary laws of a big city.

Attractive Lawbreakers.

“Now, all this mad roar and ranting against law wouldn’t really hurt our young people if they did not actually see law being laughed at and broken everywhere. They watch the beautiful movie star laughingly violate, on the screen, the Sixth Commandment in the setting of a glamorous penthouse. The musical revue gets its laughs out of violations of the decencies. The smutty story, all too common on young lips, gets its fun out of adultery, lust, and the sins which reduce a man to the level of a prowling dog and a woman to the status of an alley cat. In the popular novels and plays heroes and heroines have claimed positive credit and sympathy for their broken laws. And the strong business man who wins success at all costs, is the hero whose name and later life is immortalised in great philanthropic enterprises financed with the millions he made smashing competitors and oppressing his employees.

Hard on the Good.

“Well, what is going to happen? What has actually happened? The most fundamental laws of personal decency have been treated with such contempt that a girl still in love with her purity has almost to fight for that purity in a group of supposedly better-class people. A girl who reverences her immensely precious dignity is treated as a prude. Isn’t she, Sue!”

“Yes,” replied Sue, very quietly.

“And a young man who sees no fun in muddling his brain with bad alcohol and developing the unsteady gait of a dancing bear and the uncontrolled instincts of a chimpanzee is regarded as a weakling when he refuses to drink. Isn’t he, Dick?”

“Yes,” Dick answered.

Curtailing Freedom.

“Why, a man is not free to invest in bonds any more, for fear some powerful, skilful crook at the top will feel justified in disregarding all the laws of business honesty, use the investors’ money much more recklessly than if it were his own, and build up a crazy, wobbly tower of Babel as Ivar Kreuger did or Samuel Insull. People today hug their poor savings to their hearts, afraid to put them into the legitimate business of honest men, because they have seen the effects of the lawless scramble for wealth and power. Legitimate and honourable trade is not free to advance because of those who have violated every law of business integrity. We’ve seen this in the Depression.

“Women who obey the laws of God and nature and with happy hearts bear children are regarded as half-wits by the women who selfishly refuse society the increase it must have if it is not to disappear. Scrupulously honest men find the going too hard in competition with the trickery and law-shaving of clever rivals, backed by unscrupulous lawyers.

“Why, it is becoming positively difficult to live like a human being and act like a good citizen, because men and women have come to such a contempt for all law that they break it when and where it suits their whim and convenience.”

Law in Heaven.

Father Hall suddenly stood up. They had not noticed it was already dark. He crossed the unlighted study, went to a window, and threw up the shade to its very top. There against the black velvet of the Christmas-tide sky burned the brilliant light of God's stars.

“Look at them,” said Father Hall, gesturing in silhouette toward the heavens. “With magnificent order and law and rhythm they move on their limitless way. Stars hold their course; suns send their warmth to whole solar systems; great choruses of planets move through the perfect figures of an endless dance; gravity holds them in place, secure against accident or catastrophe. God's natural law rules the heavens.”

Slowly he walked back into the room and switched on a low-powered lamp.

And on Earth?

“Man moves through a world of perfect law and order. Seasons recur with measured regularity. From seed comes plant; from plant, seed in lawful succession. In the heart of the molecule is the orderly atom; in the heart of the atom an infinitesimal solar system that moves as regularly and as beautifully as the stars. Man's body is a magnificent laboratory in which God's laws work with consistent reliability, rebuilding, adding, sending blood to the part of the body that needs it, telegraphing along the intricate nervous system each pain or delight, giving him the power to people the world with his own kind.

“It is a world so law-bound that scientists talk of the universal, unchangeable natural law. Only when we come to man himself do we find a new element. Man is free to obey law or to attack it, to give his will proudly to authority or to defy it, to follow the law spoken to him in the clear voice of conscience or to fling his glove in the face of God.

Free, Yet Not Free.

“Does that mean for a moment that man alone, of all God's creatures, has no law for his nature? Absolutely no. Man is God's most precious creature, and after caring for all His less important creatures, He would not cast His sons and daughters adrift. It means only that God wishes, in the case of His sons and daughters, to be served, not as the stars and plants and animals serve Him, like slaves and bondsmen; He asks from men and women the free and willing service of love and obedience.

“He has left men free to violate His law, so that they can freely and splendidly and with full consciousness give Him their grateful obedience.

“Oh, there are laws so clearly written into the nature of man that not all the smart writing of the modern pagan can obliterate them. The God Who gave laws to the satellites of Mars and Jupiter, and to the seeds of corn and wheat and to the dog in the gutter is not likely to throw out His best creatures without the guidance and protection of law. He has given man laws, and man in his heart knows them. Even the doddering old grandfather, who, in Pearl Buck's ‘The Good Earth’, shouted after the courtesan brought as second wife to his son, ‘Harlot! There is a harlot in this house’; knew and recognised the law of purity.

Fierce Attack.

“All the arguments of the novelists and dramatists and philosophers of selfishness and greed and lust will never obliterate them. These may dominate the world of literature, and to some extent the world of thought today; they are loud in their outcry and clever in their beclouding of issues and truths. They are struggling to find every possible excuse for man to follow the easy law of the beast in his blood, rather than the splendid law of the angel in his soul. They have misled those of the older generation, who were only too willing to be misled, and have taken sides with the hot passion of youth against the less clamorous voice of reason. They are doing the world untold harm and youth the most frightful injustice. In the end they will go down into oblivion, and the law of God and nature will endure.”

The priest looked at the twins quietly, and for a few seconds drew silently on his pipe. Dick reached for a fresh cigarette, and then thought better of it, and sat back motionless. Sue never shifted her glance from the dim face of the priest. Then suddenly he smiled, and asked quietly, “Are you wondering why I am orating like this?”

Neither of the twins replied.

Guard Your Liberty.

“Because,” Father Hall continued, “I am desperately afraid you will use your newfound liberty to your own hurt. Too many of your companions and associates are using it and will use it — forgive me for saying it — to play fools. I have seen them do it. They use liberty as a chance to drink themselves stupid or into perilous temptations. They use it to go places where they know sin waits with fetid breath and ugly embrace. They use it to question the good judgment of mother and father, and their very right to command. They use it to forget that the principal purpose of school is class and chapel; its real objective a mental, physical, and spiritual training that will fit them for the pitiless struggle of life. It is not, by the remotest stretch of imagination, a rest sanatorium between weekends.

“They forget that this precious liberty is also the most destructive thing in the world if not used with the restraining guidance of law, and that the man or woman who in theory or practice comes to despise law and authority and to kick it aside is going to become an enemy of society, a rebel against God, and a mental and spiritual suicide. Do you see?”

“I think I do,” said Dick, slowly.

Men, Women, and Fools.

“You are given this precious liberty to do splendid things, and not stupid or ugly ones. You are always free to play a manly part. You are never free to play the fool. You are always free to be the gloriously womanly woman, the kind before whom every decent man stands with bowed head; you are not free to ape the manners or the dress or the postures of the women against whom, until recent times, the doors of decent homes were closed. And quite too many young men are using their liberty to act like fools, sailors on a spree, or unleashed animals; just too many young women are acting in a fashion that makes prostitution a vanishing profession.

Parallel.

“Now, note carefully. If a man cannot become even a passable athlete unless he obeys the laws of the game and watches the laws of health, how, in heaven’s name, when he has cheapened his power

of love by playing lover to every girl he meets at a dance, and has befuddled with the flavoured varnish of the bootlegger the brain which must be clear and keen for any sort of success in life — how can he hope to be a successful husband and father and professional or business man?

“If a girl cannot hope to succeed as a singer unless she learns the laws of voice and protects her throat against even the chance cold wind, how can she hope to train herself to be a pure wife and a worthy mother if she gives her lips in sham affection to men whose names she has just heard, and feels free to contaminate her body with the rough handling of chance companions?

“And how will the mothers and fathers of this coming generation dare to demand respect and reverence from their children when they know they have shown their own parents casual tolerance, and a cynical disregard of their wishes and commands?

Hard But Splendid.

“As far as I personally am concerned, the law, in itself, means little to me. I feel toward it something as I feel toward five-finger exercises and the place-kick practice of early football season. But I am interested in the great pianist thrilling me with a concerto, and I do want to throw my hat in the air when the ball is kicked between the goal posts by the trained forward’s toe.

“And I do love to see a well-disciplined, carefully trained, personally organised, thoroughly reliable man or woman face life, and, because he or she has obeyed the rules of the game, win, with strong body and clean mind and vigorous will and an eye that can command because it has been clear-sighted enough to obey.

“Of course, what I am asking is hard, as everything worth while is hard — playing the violin well, being a star athlete, writing a great book, painting a great picture, performing a difficult task as an engineer. Of course, it is easier to break a law than to keep it, as it is easier to pull a rose bush to pieces than it is to raise it to full bloom. But it is easier to miss a field goal than to kick it, strike a discord than locate a fascinating new harmony, daub up a fence than paint the ‘Angelus’, by Millet, let a business go to pot than organise a great corporation.

“Leave easy things to louts.”

No More Good limes?

This time Dick took his cigarette and lighted it slowly before he spoke. At last he said:

“Then you mean you think we should give up all idea of a good time while we are young and just train ourselves by the observance of law?”

Father Hall’s quick eye saw the grateful glance that passed from Sue to her twin. But he waved his hands almost wildly in protest.

“That’s just the sort of idea that sloppy modern thought is driving into young people’s heads. And the good Lord alone knows how violently ill it makes me. Who said anything about giving up a good time? I was talking about giving up a fool time. And I’m utterly dumbfounded that good and fool even sound alike.”

“But —” began Sue.

What Makes a Good Time?

“Forgive the interruption,” said the priest, “but I confess I’m just a bit excited. I absolutely deny that a genuinely good time can be had except by obeying the law. I admit that many people nowadays have the same crazy ideas about a good time that the pagans had in Roman days, that a good time consists in drinking more than the stomach can hold or the brain govern, dancing utterly ugly dances to the rhythm of an African tom-tom, and — forgive me for saying it, because I’m sure you don’t indulge in it — in the promiscuous love-making and maudlin affection called necking.

“If the human race, after all its centuries of civilisation and religion and education, has reached the point where it knows no good time above the level of a drunken sailor, an African cannibal in a blood orgy, or a stray gutter cat, the human race had better start making some laws to save itself from annihilation. If there is no good time except the one that precedes headaches and heartaches, that ruins digestion, corrupts manners, imperils innocence and purity, and devolutes the human race from men to animals, then I’m desperately sorry for this generation.

Happy Though Sane.

“With all my soul I want you to have a good time. Go to the theatre and see every good play you can afford. Dance in a fashion that gives you joy and the spectators pleasure, peacefully and happily. Dress smartly and gracefully, but not like gangsters or gangsters’ molls. Go with your friends and do interesting and amusing things and see interesting and amusing places. But come out from them with head erect and feet steady and body clean and eyes clear, and the laws of God and man still upright in your heart.”

Quietly Father Hall walked over and lowered the blind, which he had flung up in his hasty gesture. The twins sat silently looking at each other. When he had once more resumed his seat and was pulling quietly at his pipe, Dick spoke up.

“You win, Father.”

“In the concrete,” Sue added, “what do you want us to do?”

Free to Develop.

Father Hall’s smile was quick and grateful.

“Grand!” he exclaimed softly. “Proud of you!” And then, after a pause, “It’s really very simple. Use that precious liberty of yours to develop yourselves to splendid manhood and lovely womanhood.

“Use the fact that you are free, with this modern freedom granted youth, to give your mother and father the respect and obedience they do not demand. After all, they are older than you, wiser, have tested the laws of life, and know them from an experience as yet not yours. When they command it is not to hurt you, but to save you hurt.

“They make you few requests and give you few orders. Be big enough to give them freely a respectful obedience that they are too generous to force from you.”

“We will,” said Sue, very softly.

“Thousands of people today are measuring their conduct by the immediate thrill of the extra cocktail or the caress cheaply given and thoughtlessly taken. It’s a poor standard. Can’t you measure your conduct by what this act or its omission will mean to you ten years from now? You see, there are sanctions for every law that nature places upon its children; the world today is full of no-account, drifting college graduates, men and women, who are paying that sanction in ill-health,

flabby wills, unfulfilled promise, momentary brilliance quickly extinguished, home and marriages quickly made and more quickly broken, children puzzled and resentful with their own parents, and an inability to enjoy anything beyond a new CD or a new jazz record, a bottle of gin, a night at the Follies, a cheap magazine, new clothes, and a chance acquaintance with the current wisecracks of some night club.”

“We’ve seen them,” said Dick grimly. “But I had never thought of the context before.”

Why Outlawed?

“If the laws for the conduct of young men and women when together seem strict, it is so that the love of married life will be fresh and vigorous and gloriously unspoiled. Half of the marriages today are wrecked before they begin. Neither party has anything but a secondhand, shopworn love to bring the other. Their emotions have been spoiled by lust before they have been glorified by love.

“The laws against evil reading often seem annoying. But they are really not half so annoying as the evil temptations that torture an imagination that has fed on smut, or the doubts and difficulties that dynamite the calm, glorious peace and security of faith.

“Please remember that the Ten Commandments are really God’s training rules for sturdy manhood and vigorous womanhood. The laws of nature are given for the perfect realisation of our natures. Drunkards, libertines, thieves (whether in the caps of the Apache Indians or the silk hats of the slick moderns), the selfish and greedy, the literary man who loves the gutter and prefers the smart phrase to the true one, the man of affairs who sets his heart on power or gold, will never attain that perfectly realised nature. That is left for the saints.”
