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THE BODY PHYSIOLOGIC AND THE BODY POLITIC¹

By Dr. WALTER B. CANNON

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At this bewildering time, when ancient customs are not respected, when new forms of society are being advocated and tried, when doubts cloud plans for present and future action, it is pertinent to inquire whether we might seek and find a social organization which would yield more of the benefits of security than we now enjoy. This search is natural. In the evolution and behavior of living beings the trend towards security has been one of the outstanding features. The oyster's shell, the bird's quick wings, the tiger's teeth and such human devices as clothing, houses and the varieties of insurance illustrate the universality of provisions for assured existence. The

¹Address of the retiring president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Philadelphia, December 27, 1940. This essay is an elaboration of ideas expressed in an epilogue to a volume published in 1932, entitled "The Wisdom of the Body."

search for security is also important. In the relations among men in civilized nations there are many harrowing uncertainties. Industries are destroyed by inventions; business catastrophies create misery as hosts of laborers are suddenly thrown out of employment or realize that they hold precarious jobs; wars inflict on great populations death or painful and debilitating wounds and spread far and wide wretchedness and want. Under such stressful conditions masses of men may be led into precipitate and violent action. No wonder, then, that we look for a more stable society. Yet there are values we would not lose in the effort to gain greater stability of social organization. We would by all means wish to avoid the blight of a fixed rigidity of occupations or classes. We would wish also to avoid any check on human ingenuity directed towards advancing the welfare of mankind. Those

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