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Mercy That Condemns

The perpetuity of any nation depends upon the stability of its government, and the integrity of any government rests upon the security of its foundation principles and their rigid application. The fundamental principle of government is justice and the operation of justice demands law. Anything which perverts justice, which undermines law, is sooner or later destructive. Tyranny perverts justice and so is destructive. Pity and kindness themselves, when they stay justice, are devastation to the very cause they would nurture.

The man living far from his fellows is a law unto himself; give him companions and it becomes necessary to restrain his actions, because the satisfaction of all his impulses would infringe upon the rights of his companions. And so we have customs and laws, and because the welfare of the whole depends upon their strict observance they are held sacred. Yet it is a recognized principle that law in itself must not be made a fetish; in so far, only, as it enables all men to have their rights should we hold it inviolable.

But Americans of today are passing from this conception to the one which holds that laws may be broken if they interfere with personal desires and ambition; that laws may be modified in order to save humiliation and suffering to the unfortunate criminal and his unhappy family. Laws are overridden almost with impunity; the man of finance buys United States Senators; the great trust defies the government; the rebater, the bank defaulter, the petty criminal, the murderer,—each successfully plies his trade. It is