

THE RATIONALE OF PROGRESS.

By

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"Life is what we make it." says the proverb, and perhaps more science never got into fewer words. Life, the life of any organism, plant, animal, or the life of the organism, society, is simply what that organism makes of itself.

It is the progressive realization of an ideal, the bodying forth of thought in a mode of manifestation which constitutes that form of life. Life is one, with many forms.

Whatever may be true of other forms, the organism we call "man" is conscious of at least a part of the process which constitutes his being. He knows some of his relations to other forms, may compare other forms together, and with himself, and so reason from the parts toward the whole. He gains some knowledge of the plan of the whole by tracing the plan of the parts. When man has reached the stage of self-knowledge, he becomes self-directive, with power to choose. When he forms some conception of the ideal of which he is the expression, he begins to be responsible for

that expression. Self-direction implies self-responsibility, the obligation to obtain the highest realization of the idea embodied in self. But man now appreciates something of his relation to the whole, so that he feels this responsibility as directed toward something outside of and transcending self.

As knowledge increases, moral responsibility develops. Every new relation discovered brings with it a new obligation.

Society being an organism composed of sentient beings morally responsible, is itself responsible for the realization of the ideal it embodies, the highest development of humanity.

Its journey toward this goal constitutes progress, and it is with the rationale of this progress we are concerned.

As with the individual, responsibility grows with growing intelligence, increasing with the ever-increasing relations of its members. With the growth of human knowledge, comes the growing obligation of human society to order itself according to that knowledge.

Knowledge, then, becomes the basis of progress. The goal of knowledge is omniscience, but humanity may not measure its distance from the goal.

Conscious Movement.

In the progress of society, we discern two movements. First, conscious, determinative, purposive movement, in which the step upward is the logical conclusion from premises. Such a movement is possible only among civilized and educated people.

It can take place only when a large part of the people have reached that philosophic stage where they are capable of interpreting history, and of analyzing the processes of their own thought. Usually this progress is confined to a few leaders who think for themselves, and are viewed by the rest of society as visionaries, fools or fanatics. These men are the pilots who find the channels for succeeding generations, the scouts who explore and open up new territory for expanding thought to conquer. Sooner or later,

society, tracing their foot-prints step by step, comes in to occupy the new ground.

Beliefs

The progress of society is largely a change from one belief to another.

If man is a bundle of habits, society is a bundle of beliefs. The structure of society may be likened to a block house, builded one belief upon another.

One element of strength is the absolute integrity and completeness of each block.

Another is the homogeneity of material of all the blocks, i.e., truth. Beliefs that are incomplete, or that lack integrity, may serve a temporary purpose, but they must be removed and their places filled to maintain the structure in a crucial test. So growth is a taking out and a putting in as well as an adding of new material.

The rate of progress will depend upon the predominance of the one or the other. But, before any structure or scheme of society can be elaborated, it is necessary to have a secure foundation,

some fact to serve as the bed rock upon which to build.

Revelation.

At the first, man was entirely a creature of circumstances. Before he became conscious of any system, or order, or sequence of thought within himself, his life was a struggle for existence; a blind struggle to adapt himself to individual outside forces and contingencies as they came. After ages of this blind effort for self-preservation through adaptation, he became able to trace an order and sequence in these forces. He saw that phenomena came, as it were, in sets, and that some experiences came oftener than others; he found himself confronted by conditions which he had experienced before, and thus he came to recognize the identity of recurring phenomena. He found that certain sets of phenomena always followed certain other sets, and later, discovered that the first were preceded by still

other sets. So expectation arose.

When he found before him conditions which had previously preceded a given set of phenomena, he began to expect these, and, remembering how he had before surmounted them, he now prepared for the struggle. Man had attained provision. In some instances, he had been forced by circumstances to an adjustment a little different from that on other occasions. Experience taught him that some adjustments were less painful and more effectual than others, and he was led to follow the better.

Thus the plan of external nature forced itself upon him; he discovered that his self-preservation depended upon conformity to that. As he recognized more and more the relations of phenomena, he gained a larger knowledge of the plan, and his adjustment became better. Still he found that events did not occur as he expected, so that his preparation was often at fault; and in looking

over the preceding conditions, he found something there which had not been there in other cases; hence he learned to observe more closely. By doing this, he found that a series of conditions containing this unusual element was different all the way through, and that without this element they were the same as he had expected.

Hence he came to look upon this disturbing element as the cause of the variation; but, if this element, always followed by certain variations, was the cause of these variations, and the variations never occurred without this element in the preceding conditions, then these conditions without the disturbing element were the cause of the phenomena without the variation.

In this way, man discovered cause and effect in external nature.

But he still made mistakes, his provision was faulty, his adaptation bad.

Long and anxiously he went over and over the ground to find another disturbing element which he thought must

be there. He found none, but discovered that he had overlooked some of the conditions. When he brought these in, he remembered that they were followed by the series to which he had previously adjusted himself, but with respect to which he was at fault this time. Now he saw that his failure was not due to any disturbing element in the outside conditions, but to his insufficient knowledge of these conditions. Thus was man first introduced to himself, not in the attainment of success, but in failure.

He discovered that his efforts to adapt himself to conditions followed an order similar to that he observed outside, that if this order corresponded exactly to that outside, he succeeded, but if not, if he left out a part, he failed. He had been making a plan of conduct, if his plan accorded with the order he observed, he attained his end, if not, he suffered.

Henceforth success meant his ability to conform his plan, which he could

change, to the outside conditions, which he could not change. But now he remembered that there were some conditions which he could change with advantage to himself, and the management of these became a part of his plan.

Having now recognized himself as a planning animal, capable, in small limits, of making conditions and changing them, his thoughts dwelt more and more upon his plans and his planning ability. He looked about him and saw no other planning animal comparable to himself. In small measure, he was master of the situation.

But man was still a failure, he viewed the mighty plans he might make and perform; but always before his eyes was the Great Plan to which his own must conform.

He recognized his power over his own plans, his personality in them; but where was the Personality from whom emanated the Great Plan?

Infinity greater than himself must be this One. Ages of painful adap-

tation had taught him reverence for the Plan; now budding knowledge teaches him reverence for the Planner.

From the recognition of himself as the person from whom emanated plans, he passed to thinking of the Source of the Great Plan as a Person.

The facts which experience with nature had taught him, he attributed to this Being. The inexorableness which he had found in nature he attributed to the Cause. The feeling of necessity for conformance with the Plan was translated into a feeling of responsibility to the Planner. There arose within man the idea that he ought to get into accord with Nature.

He had ceased, however, to think of it as a necessity of his being, but regarded it as a duty owed to a higher Being. When he failed and suffered, he looked upon his suffering as a punishment. This feeling of responsibility to a Cause outside of and transcending the laws of Nature only increased man's Chagrin at his

failure to keep these laws. Death, which he supposed to be the climax of human failure, was ever before him.

It was at this point that man made the great mistake from which he has not yet fully recovered. As we have seen, he had discovered within himself a law of thought and progress similar to that outside, that since this discovery, he had striven to bring the inside process into exact accord with the outside. But, because as he made this effort, his conception of the law outside himself expanded, and the goal seemed farther and farther away, he turned in despair from the outside manifestation to the inside. He forgot, or never realized, that the inside process was but a product of experience of the external Plan, that it was but an incomprehensive part of it. Disregarding this, he set about working over his mental store to build of it a plan without referring each step to the outside manifestation of the Universal Plan.

to discover whether it accorded with that, whether or no it was true.

The farther he went, the greater his departure from the Universal Plan.

It was in this stage that our "first parents" sinned and fell from grace and not in the discovery of an inside law of thought.

And now man calls a halt.

He has tried outside himself and inside himself and still he fails, and is subject to death. He turns in his despair to the Great Cause as the only other source of help. But here man reaps the first fruits of his sin. He has divorced himself from the true process and committed himself to a faulty one. Instead of reading the Great Cause in terms of his own manifestation, he reads Him in terms of self. The Character which he attributes to the Deity he has obtained from wholly unverified combinations of thought elements—"My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord."

Forgetting that the inexorable Plan to which he has struggled so long to adjust himself is God's Plan, and remembering only the changeableness of his own system, he reads this changeableness into the Divine Character. Turning his eyes from the plan of present salvation before him to the Being he has constructed from within, and whom he is pleased to call God, he looks to him for a plan of salvation from sin; not realizing that sin is his divorce from the Universal Plan. As the character of the God he appeals to is built up from the unverified and embryonic processes of his own mind the plan is not long coming. A wish, a hope, a belief, and man is in possession of a short-cut to salvation. But the revelation comes to the mind, comes through the imperfect, distorted system that has been built up without reference to the Natural System in which it had its origin and from which it is now divorced. Nature knows

no short-cuts, and Nature's God shows none.

But man now has a new revelation, a new "Divine" plan, and he goes forth to realize it in the realm of the old. He soon finds the old Plan as operative as ever.

Whatever the new plan of salvation means, it does not mean escape from the old necessity, conformity to the Universal. "The wages of sin is death" still; the result of broken law is failure and suffering, as before. By this fact the mind is turned again to the Natural Plan, but it revolts from the severity of it. The new plan is more attractive, it offers a solution of man's duty and destiny that is more pleasant to contemplate. Consequently reason, or reference of its terms to terms of the Universal, is suppressed as a sin against man's interests.

Now, if the salvation of the new plan does not come in the realm of the old there is still a field for it. Man's old enemy, death, yet faces

him in all its grimness, and the new plan cannot save him. Salvation now means to him the escape after death from the effect of law broken during life, for the old idea of inexorable law, of cause and effect, is a part of man's nature and cannot be expunged. Not only has his inability in this life to absolve himself, under the new plan, from the necessities of the old, strengthened this idea, but it has also led him to bring in with the new plan a new set of duties and obligations equally binding and impossible of fulfillment.

At this stage the theory of vicarious atonement steps in to help man out of the bog. It is a part of the new revelation, comes from the same source through the same channel and is likewise unrevealed in the Eternal Plan.

But the theory completes the plan of salvation as conceived to be revealed by the Great Cause directly to the mind (or heart) of man. No matter that it is at variance with God's Eternal

Revelation of himself in the Universe; man has sinned, is redeemed and saved.

Along with the theory of vicarious atonement, and growing out of it, is the notion of freedom from personal responsibility, the idea that any law may be broken with impunity provided the act is repented of before death. This idea is not a necessary part of the theory of vicarious atonement, but it points to that as its origin. This notion showed its ugliest features in the sale of "indulgences" in the time of Luther, but it is preached today in the form of "eleventh-hour" salvation.

Another part of this new revelation is the theory of special providence, the notion that everything which happens, — all natural phenomena, is watched over and molded by God with reference to man. In a word, that the Universe exists for man instead of man for the Universe. This climax of human conceit had its

origin in man's brain. It certainly has not arisen out of his experiences.

Man's knowledge even of the small spect upon which he crawls, and of the forces operating here is calculated to beget a more humble opinion of his importance. According to this theory man is the chief object of God's care and solicitude, which is almost equivalent to saying that God exists for man's benefit. The Universe was created and is managed, much as a machine shop is managed, for the especial delectation of man.

Man was created and put upon the earth with all the powers he now possesses. In accordance with this idea, and in proportion to his forgetfulness of experience, man appeals to God to change his plan to accommodate individual wants. If he has some insight into the Universal Plan and prays in line with it, he believes its out-working comes in answer to his prayer, but if his prayer is not "answered" he believes it is because

of his ignorance as to what is best for him — Wise conclusion!

Universal Revelation.

Opposed to this theory of revelation to man by word of mouth, to the idea of the Universe having been made for man and man placed in it, stands the notion that the Universe is God's Revelation of himself, that man is a part, indeed, a very small part, of this Revelation. Nor is the Revelation directed exclusively to man. It lays open to itself — to all Life. Because man can understand a little of some of it need he be puffed up? What reason has humanity to think it is the ultimate crop which God will reap from this Universe? As well might any extinct form of life have held the same opinion of itself. On some other planet a race of beings a little lower, or a little higher than humanity, may hold a like conceit. On still another planet a form of life much higher than humanity may have risen above such notions, may have a con-

ception of the Universal Plan such as man is yet incapable of imagining. The fact of this planet's history makes a similar history for others more probable than improbable.

But man is here upon the earth, and we are men and must live the human life. To live, man must act; to act, he must believe; to believe, he must be persuaded; to be persuaded, his mind must be acted upon. Before his eyes is spread out the Universe, the Divine Plan, the Eternal Truth. In it, and as a part of it, he has come to be what he is, a personality, a reasoning being. Is this Revelation sufficient to guide his further life? We reply that, since man has come to be what he is through the realization of this Plan, his further progress must be made in the same manner. Indeed, all the future of humanity has its roots fixed in the past and the present. Since man became self-directive all the conscious effort which has resulted

in progress has been in line with this Plan; and all the conscious effort not in line with this Plan has not been progress. The Revelation is sufficient to guide man's conscious life, because it is the Revelation of the Plan of all life, conscious and unconscious.

The belief of man in this Revelation does not need to be announced; his presence here is sufficient evidence of his belief and of his action on that belief. We believe a thing when we act as if it were true, and man's presence on this earth is a living testimony to his belief in the Universal Plan as the plan of his life and action. Belief and the progress of humanity are limited only by the limits of human knowledge.

As he appreciates the Plan man conforms to it, because it is recognized as a law of his nature, a necessity of his life. In the conscious growth of society as a self-directing organism, belief in the Universal Plan

becomes a direct cause of action as soon as enough of that Plan is understood to enable society to consciously and purposely seek adjustment to it. Better adjustment means higher development and consequent appreciation of the need of further adjustment. Man is always attaining but always seeing more to be attained, yet in this he reaches self-development, or the realization of the idea embodied in self.

Unconscious Movement.

On the other hand, when man is not conscious of his belief in this Divine Plan, when he fails to recognize a Plan at all, but simply shapes his action from a feeling of necessity, belief becomes an indirect cause of action. This unconscious belief is based upon a knowledge of the manifestation rather than on any realization of the Plan itself.

This form of belief, or feeling of necessity, has been for ages, and in the great majority of relations, is still

the determining factor in human progress. It is the cause of the unconscious movement of society in which the step upward is not planned nor understood, nor realized as progress, but is taken because it seems to be the next thing to do in avoidance of present difficulties. Civilized society has advanced to its present high position more by seeking to avoid the stern necessities forced upon it by self-development than by any conscious effort to co-operate with the Divine Plan.

There are two ways of viewing this unconscious progress, those who hold to the theory of God's especial care over man as distinguished from other life, and special providence in his favor; look upon this growth as a justification of their theory. On the other hand those who look upon man as a part of the Universe, whose plan of development is a part of the Universal Plan, see in this growth nothing more than the normal realization of

that Plan — a progress from cause to effect. The fact that the development has come without man's conscious effort, and sometimes in spite of his efforts, is due to his ignorance and conceit; his failure to find his place in Nature and to order his action accordingly.

Obstacles to Progress.

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to progress is our bondage to the past, the worship of old customs, old forms of action, old way of thinking.

This is the unprogressive habit of mind which brings men into opposition to all innovation or reform and causes them to regard their present opinions as final; and to form themselves into parties and sects sworn to uphold these opinions against all opposition. The human mind has been shut to new truths mostly because it has been shut to the method of gaining new truth.

Open-mindedness and the spirit of investigation have been lacking.

Where the old views were partial and unsatisfactory, impatience has caused them to be pieced out with theory and the whole regarded and acted upon as truth. This has led man to the conclusion that there is nothing more to be discovered concerning the origin, development, and destiny of humanity. Regarding this fundamental matter as settled in the past, men have considered other questions of life and conduct as either included in this, or as having had a similar solution.

This has given man a reverence for the past and a dependence upon it which has blinded his eyes to the true dependence. He has failed to get the lesson of history. As a result of this failure he is ignorant of truth and still more ignorant of the method of reaching truth.

The most harmful of all ignorance is the inability to read the meaning of history, to trace cause and effect, to find an orderly Plan, and to

discover man's part in its realization.
Duty.

Keeping in view the path by which man has come to his present stage of civilization, and his present heritage of knowledge, we conceive it to be his first duty to keep his mind open to all truth.

That he may do this the utmost freedom of thought must be accorded him. Truth is Universal and every avenue to it lies open to the earnest searcher till man builds barricades, and stations guards.

The coercion of thought has enslaved the race, and an emancipation proclamation is needed. Dogma is old and decrepit, and ought to be dead and "gathered to its fathers"—ignorance and conceit.

With every source of truth open to his investigation, and with "none to molest, nor make him afraid," man finds his second duty in the obligation to live up to the highest knowledge he possesses.

By the utilization of what he has
 he acquires more — "To him that hath
 shall be given." Through this process
 man has lived, by reason of it he
 is living, and in accordance with
 it he shall live. It is God's method.
 "In me ye have Eternal Life." It is the
 Universal Plan, — The Eternal Truth.

When human effort accords with
 this it can no longer be said of
 man: "My thoughts are not your
 thoughts, neither are your ways
 my ways," saith the Lord.

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