

The Wave-like Movement of Civilization.

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June, 1899.

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The Wave-like Movement of Civilization.

As we step into the field of speculative philosophy, we are struck by the amazing number of ideas and opinions as to the significance and nature of civilization. Among these, we still find, at the present day, a feeling of doubt on the part of some as to whether civilization is a benefit or an evil to humanity. A few even take upon themselves to say that the evil tendencies seem to be gaining more rapidly than the good, and that they hide so much that has an elevating tendency. But we must bear in mind that the moral tendency constitutes only one of the many elements which are found to underlie all stages of civilization. Some of these others being intelligence, science, art, literature, and liberty. As all the individuals of any stage of civilization become more highly developed intellectually, physically, morally, and spiritually they as a whole and as individual members of this state of society have their capacity for doing good or evil increased in the same proportion as their degree of development in each of the great departments of human activity. Then, in order to counteract this tendency if such exist,

there is a new field open to turn our forces in to and see that each individual receives a proper training to fit him to enjoy the present civilization and that it shall in turn receive an element of strength from his existence.

As we look about us and notice the different stages of civilization that seem to be manifested in the different nations, at the present day, in the western and eastern hemisphere both north and south of the equator; we feel inclined to ask ourselves if there is such a thing as a general tendency toward civilization pervading the whole race, or are there only a few chosen nations that are destined to undergo this process of growth; and the remaining nations to be denied this privilege, and always doomed to suffer as they search in vain, in their narrow, dark, and gloomy sphere of the present, for a better and higher ideal of life for the future? We cannot resign ourselves to this view, but firmly believe that man's advent, to this temporary home, was for a definite purpose. That his process of development is the result of some natural organic laws, which are at the present time be-

coming partly known to man thru the untiring efforts of our modern investigators) which man can obey or disobey as his conscience or inner self shall dictate. If he transgresses these laws, he alone must primarily suffer by his own free will. But, if he obeys these laws we cannot place any limit to the degree of his ultimate attainment.

There is reason to believe that every member of the human family is pervaded by the elements of civilization and urging it upward and onward, as certainly, as the existence of man is the result of natural forces. All men irrespective of race or national characteristics are the ultimate result of natural laws, which recognize no special privileges or inequalities, but all were created equal to partake of the natural resources of the universe.

Undoubtedly, the existence of man is for a grand and noble purpose, for the expansion and development of his personality. In order, that this might be accomplished and this terrestrial sphere might reflect the splendor of a God-like being whose home is the earth, he was given possession to transform and mould it into a

garden that would permit the unfoldment and development of the highest, grandest, and noblest qualities of his innate being.

The gradual change that man has passed thru, in the progress of the ages, in his ability to affect and to do in the various branches of science (for instance, how his conception of the shape and existence of the earth has advanced from the crude and flat earth with a sun rising in the east and setting in the west to a globe, which is only one of a number of planets, spinning on its axis and swinging in an endless orbit around a central luminous body) indicates that he is a progressive being. If this indication is true, there must be a state to which he is progressing or a stage of individual development, which is yet unknown.

Then, if such exist the advancement must be for a definite purpose. From this manifestation of progress, we believe that man has a destiny to fulfil. We cannot believe that the civilizations (however, crude or barbaric according to our present standard of judgement) of the past were without some benefit to the succeeding generations. But we are rather inclined

to think that each stage in the era of human progress has transmitted, from age to age, to be handed from one race of people to another, and from nation to nation, something which is never lost, but which grows and continues as a common stock to the end of all human activity. These forces underlying the primitive form of society gather others around them and thus laying a larger and more stable foundation for the future civilizations to build upon.

In looking into the history of the past, is it not the type of the civilization that commands our attention and admiration, and the very fact in which all the activities of the age centres, and all things end? And, if, we wish to gather any facts as to the past existence of any nation or race of people, we invariably aim to ascertain their type and degree of civilization; and what have they done to forward the progress of mankind, and what part have they acted in the great drama of life? I might very forcibly sum up by saying, "civilization is, as it were, the grand emporium of a people, in which all its wealth - all the elements of its life - all the powers of its existence are stored up." So

the civilization of any particular people is, as it were, a panorama which discloses the climax and halting places of human activity.

It is even thought that there has never been any 'actual ebb in the tide of human development' but that every step has been a step forward, even with the foot of the barbarian on the neck of the declining civilization, which it seemed to crush to death. Only the spirit of the old civilization was destroyed by coming in forcible contact with new material. The ideas of the old civilization were never destroyed by the barbarians. The faults and merits of their social and political institutions were never forgotten. There was only a suffocation of the old forms of social and political institutions by such an enormous influx of new material, which, intense, was to arise in their strength and profit by the short comings of the old and lay the corner stone of a far grander social structure.

Human societies live and die. Like individuals, they have their birth, growth, and decay. In the beginning, they are destitute of any special capacity and all the elements indicating advancement; but ultimately, they receive an

impulse of life from the preceding civilization, such as it were, or from their contemporaries, and growth begins by adding other elements of progress from their national or racial characteristics, which continues to grow and develop until they have accomplished their destiny. When this seems to be fulfilled, as we see by the landmarks of the preceding civilizations, they like individuals settle back to admire their happiness and improved conditions, which finally lead to pride and inactivity; and these in their course of time are bound to plunge them into national decay.

In studying the history of the preceding civilization, we are led to believe, from the different forces which underlie the particular stage of progress, and the ultimate degree of civilization of the particular period of human activity, that civilization advances in wave-like movements from the simple constituents of primitive society from generation to generation, from nation to nation, and race to race. These simple elements of primitive society gather others about them from one generation to another until it finally reaches its climax in a few succeeding generations, who then become the civilized people of the age; and when they have exhausted their capacity

for further progress settle down in contentment to reflect on their happy lot in the present attainment. Then, follows a period of declining civilization which in the course of a few generations seem almost to disappear entirely. Finally, the surrounding barbarians, that is, their neighboring tribes or nations who seem to lack this progressive spirit, when the other tribe or nation enjoyed their period of greater activity, began to catch the drift of the past forces of progress; and these unfold and develop other elements and thus start them, which may be many generations afterwards, on an era of advancement with enthusiasm which is often manifested in a spirit of conquest; and when their mission is accomplished, or ideal is attained, they seem to be satisfied in maintaining their present degree of civilization; and glory in their industrial and intellectual growth on the strength of their capacity, ability, and accomplishments in the past. Then, follows a period of struggle for the existing state of society to stand on its feet, but finally weakened by lack of internal harmony and unity, it falls to the ground.

Now, as this tribe or nation, as the case may be, was advancing in progress, the surrounding tribes or nations, or barbarians, as they

are often called when they have not been awakened by the forces of civilization, were not altogether asleep, but were drinking, so to speak, the overflowing spirit of the progressive tribe or nation.

They would in time become saturated with the ideas of the progressive age, and this spirit may even pass thru these people and be transmitted to an entirely different race, who being more susceptible to this influence, in an adjoining country; and here, the spirit of progress may burst into a flame, and again unfold and develop new elements and fire them into enthusiasm with renewed activity with a hope to enjoy a future state of happiness revealed by their ideal of a future state of society.

Now, let us glance at the history of mankind, and see what indication we can find, if any, as to the early conditions of the primitive forms of society, and thus see if history reveals any elements of civilization which have been transmitted from these early forms of society to the next generation, or to another nation, or from one age to another, and whether some of the nations have not been benefited by the advancement of the preceding generations, nations, and ages. Again, if a nation had

reached its maximum activity in the underlying forces of development whether there has been a tendency to rest content with its attainment.

As we glance over the pages of history, we are met with the statements that man began as a savage; and going back to the annals of China some 2500 or 3000 years B. C., they speak of the founders of their nation as a horde of savages roaming to and fro on the wide plains of Asia without any fixed habitations or ideas as to the future development or progress, beyond their present capacity of enjoyment, for their race. Then glancing at the Vedas of India and the Zend Avesta of Persia, which today are our chief records of their so-called early civilizations, we find them speaking of the culture or plane of existence of their ancestors as being "very barbaric in type." Again, glance at the record found in Genesis; we find the same story told without yielding any higher conception as to the plane of ancestral conditions. All seem to confirm the fact that the early conditions of the race was very low, and that the first element of the spirit of civilization in their heart had not, as yet, been touched by the elevating influence of progress, which in time, was to thrill their latent energies into an activity that should

leave a trophy to be handed to eternity, as a symbol that the uplifting influence of progress had at last begun to infuse new life into mankind from generation to generation from age to age.

Egypt is one of the most ancient countries in reference to an early form of civilization. It appears that the country has had a gradual development, with special note-worthy results in architecture. So we find that the principle constituent which appears to have been transmitted to the succeeding nations were, architecture, which in the succeeding ages seems to be an inspiration for the Assyrians and Babylonians; the art of writing appears to have its beginning here, in conjunction with the recording of human events for their present and future use. To cap the climax of her civilization, she built the grand pyramids and burial tombs, which were not even equaled by Rome. Simple in construction, but a marvel in human ingenuity in the handling of enormous masses of stone. Soon after her civilization seemed to "crystallize into an unchanging form"; and then her constant aim was to preserve unaltered the works of the past.

It is with Phoenicia that we arrive at a

period when some of the most profitable and useful elements of civilization seem to come prominently to the front; and even to-day it is impossible to estimate how much the present civilization owes her. Here we find commerce to be the chief force in her civilization, which from that day to this, has been one of the most potent factors in the development of the present industrial system, and in the dissemination of knowledge and material wealth from nation to nation. Another element which has been of an untold benefit, in the intellectual advancement, to all the nations, from that day to the present, was the origin of the modern alphabet which is the ultimate development of the primitive forms transmitted from Egypt. There was an intervention of centuries between the civilization of Egypt and that of Phoenicia with no indication of any activity tending toward a stage of progress. This interlude occurs thru-out history between the different stages of civilization. Finally, in the course of time, the alphabet passed to the Greeks and from the Greeks to the Romans each adding an element, until it is at last transmitted to the modern nations of Europe.

Then, passing to the valley of the Euphrates, we find the ancient civilization of Chaldea, was the first to develop a science of Arithmetic and Astronomy. After this nation had reached its height in the scale of civilization, they tried to maintain the conditions they had brought about (for a period) but finally, it gave way. Then succeeded a period in which scarcely an element of the preceding civilization seemed to exist. The neighboring people had received an impulse for advancement and they became the possessor of the field. Assyria as successor to the Chaldean age, received from them valuable aid in literature, so that it is here we find the first mention of a lexicon and treatise on grammar. In a comparatively short time, we find the Babylonian civilization master of the field; she takes up a number of the elements transmitted to her from the former nations; and especially architecture which she developed along a different line from the Egyptian. In architecture, we find two of her chief works are reckoned among the 'seven wonders' of the world, that is, the hanging gardens and walls; and even in astronomy we find that the Greek

scholars acknowledge themselves humble disciples of the Babylonian teachers.

If this examination were continued, we should find that the ancient civilizations of Europe are greatly indebted to the primitive civilizations of Asia and Africa. If we trace the elements underlying our modern civilization we shall find that we owe our present rapidity of progress in a great measure to the ancient civilizations which brought out these forces of progress and tested their utility. Altho some fell by their application, the succeeding nations were to receive the benefit of their experience; and thus permit the future generations to take up the spirit of progress and carry it up to a higher and grander stage of human development.

In this examination of a few nations as to the early stages of civilization, we have found that each started on its march of progress from a very low condition, and finally reached a relatively high stage of social and industrial plain of action. Then followed a period of content in the social and industrial activity. This state of content with its stage of civilization soon be-

gan to decline. Then a period of almost an entire absence of all indications of its former civilization, except a few scattered remains.

First, the evidence of the gradual development of civilization and then by a gradual decline, finally followed by a period of total absence of any indications as to any elements of progress. We are thus brought to the conclusion that civilization has a wave-like movement in development. The elements first brought to light by the early generations were transmitted to the next, and then gathered others, and then, again passed to other nations, from nation to nation, and age to age; each succeeding advancing higher than the preceding; and all receiving an impetus to a higher stage of life.