

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)

Anti-Copyright



The Two Paths

Dyer D. Lum

1890

Dyer D. Lum
The Two Paths
1890

Retrieved on 7th May 2023 from
www.libertarian-labyrinth.org

Published in *Twentieth Century* 4 no. 13 (March 27, 1890): 7–9.

usa.anarchistlibraries.net

Progress has no meaning outside of social relations. Nature records but changes in terms of evolution or devolution; man's adaptation to environments is physical. Progress is the record of change in social relations — a province wrested from nature, transforming brute into human. The veneering may be thin on some, but the thickness of the human laying over the brute is the expression of progress. Our ancestors were retrospective; our golden age lies before us. When the ancient Hebrew asked the angel why the former days were better than the new, the angel answered: "Ask not the cause. Thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this." From this Oriental view of life we have forever parted. Our paradise is to be won Our goal is the still better arrangement of social relations : the welfare of all in that of each.

When the bell wether of a flock leaps the bar the sheep follow and continue leaping after the bar is withdrawn. Such was the past history of the race. Might led servility was inculcated, and individuality decried. Looking backward from the heights of the present we discern in history the winding path of progress; we trace it from the low lands of authoritative guidance to the higher level of greater individual freedom.

Thearchy, monarchy, oligarchy; from priest to king and mob the fiction of “divine right” to rule has survived all changes, yet progress halts not. The thearch ruled and warriors, traders and toilers became castes. The warrior’s sword replaced the priestly amulet, and the priest stepped behind the throne; but three castes remained. In 1789 the throne fell, and priest and king ranged themselves behind the victorious middleman. Though trader and toiler united before the Bastille, on the morrow caste lines were drawn, and but **two** castes remain. Priest, king and trader, “these three are one,” and the toiler still obeys the injunction of earning *their* bread by the sweat of *his* brow.

Has the term of progress ceased? The mediaeval toiler was driven by three whips: priestly, over conscience and thought; royal, over will and deed; economic over access to the means of life. Religious and political liberty are issues of the past; the spirit of this century is confined to the third. Yet behind the State priest, king, and trader, stand and unitedly proclaim statute law is the higher law. The toiler, having ascended from slavery through serfdom to wage labor looks forward-and dreams. Shall we use the State or remove it? Shall we seize power and compel the overthrown castes to find place-and extinction— in our ranks? Or shall we crown the struggle for freedom by overcoming power of man over man? Direction or cooperation?

These are the **two paths** by which social change must proceed. The struggles of the past show these only, though men have vainly tried to walk both. It is not a question of dispute as to the color of a shield with disputants looking at it from opposite sides. It is a question of following **two paths**, one leading right, the other to the left; one toward authority, the other toward freedom. When the *renaissance* brought dawn to intellectual freedom the air-brake of authority was applied in vain to arrest its onward course. The impetus given freedom led, though its prophets, like Erasmus, shrank aghast at their work. Luther and Calvin proclaimed “the right of private judgment”

in religious belief and again the brakes were applied: Luther with sword to the peasants, and Calvin with fire to Servetus. They builded wiser than they knew. Voltaire and Danton became their heirs. Mankind had entered upon the path toward freedom; though many turned backward toward authority the guidon of progress was moved forward. Out of the conflict of tired combatants came toleration. Then the scene shifted from religious to political liberty.

In all revolutions men have ever sought to attain their ends by compromising principle. They forget that “compromise is incipient suicide.” Stragglers for light and darkness compromise on the happy medium—twilight, and attaining neither, both are dissatisfied. The French and American revolutions were compromised; negro slavery, property qualifications, upper legislative halls, chartered rights and prohibitory edicts attest it. They started on the path to the right and selected guides from the left. Freedom radiated from the guidon; authority wore the general’s epaulettes and belt. Though progress often is halted it never retreats.

This century faces new issues and all parliamentarism is saturated with them; factory legislation, corn laws, slavery emancipation, French revolutions and *emeutes*, tariffs and free trade, Single-tax, etc., all are economic. Freedom still leads, ever forcing the belted general, who fancies he directs, to fresh compromises. Unmindful of these lessons of the past, the friends of progress are divided into diverging wings. It is idle to indulge in the vain sentimentalism of crying, “Unite! unite!” to forces standing back to back, marching different directions. Freedom has ever weakened the autocratic power of the State; compromise alone preserves it. Seeking freedom through power is as idle as going to the sea to reap wheat. Freedom and authority are antipodal. Freedom proclaims individual freedom. When each is free, there is no freedom for the collective entity to strive for. Government is temporary, evanescent; society is eternal. The freer the social unit, the

greater the social interdependence. Remove the official support and self interest will be identical with mutual interest: free cooperation logically follows. We are free to cooperate in private associations to insure from loss, accident, sickness, death. But to *protect* mutual interests? Nay! We rise indignant and plead the baby act! Too ignorant to cooperate but wise enough to choose paternal directors! What a field for the humorists of the future! The social unit is self; social needs will determine the boundaries between self and the “outer self” in mutuality of interests. Free intellect, free belief, free electors were all once untried experiments, and wise statesmen scouted them as visionary and impracticable vagaries. Who thinks so now?

To seek reform through authority is “looking backward is grasping power to direct. Our fathers compromised because the ruling class felt the need of preserving private property in land and monopoly over the medium of exchange—the Siamese twins of Caesarism. As the bottle clouds the drunkard’s reason and bids him crave more, so power beclouds equity and incites ambition. The Georgian Commonwealth, with its free cars, free theatres, free baths, free gymnasiums, etc is a beautiful dream. Its logical basis is the Communist motto: “To each according to his *needs*,” leaving *deeds* in the cloud land of faith. It is the negation of incentive; the apotheosis of mediocrity. When the State exists to gratify *needs*, why *do*? If all desires may be met by a single tax, may not need inflate the tax? All civilized countries are rapidly socializing and *pari passu* power is centralizing into sterner hands. Their respective budgets treble in a generation. Is that the path to freedom?

Let us have done with dreamy faith. Proclaim the New Abolition — private property in nature’s gift must cease, come what may! Whether it leads to the Single-tax or free-cooperation, is for the future to decide. The means of its accomplishment is not included in the principle. When Garrison thundered, against the sin of slavery the “ collective wisdom of the nation,” en-

meshed in the web of legality, sneered, “But how?” The awakened moral sense of the people solved the riddle. Progress will not halt. All history gleams with this gospel. Priest, King, Mob, and now Self arises and proclaims itself of age, confident of finding self interest in mutual agreement. The past and present indicate the future. From Authority to Freedom is the lesson of history. The-archy, Mon-archy, Plut-archy, An-archy!