Progress

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DEFINITION OF PROGRESS. — GOLDEN AGE. — GEOLOGICAL EVOLUTION
PROGRESS AND REGRESS IN HISTORY. — RETURN TO NATURE
PRIMITIVE SIMPLICITY OF SOCIETIES AND MODERN COMPLEXITY
MUTUAL AID OF NATIONS. — LAWS OF THE MOVEMENT OF FIREPLACES
CONQUEST OF SPACE AND TIME. — CONQUEST OF BREAD
RECOVERY OF LOST ENERGIES. — AFFIRMATION OF PROGRESS

"Progress," in the strictest sense of the word, is meaningless, for the world is infinite, and in its unlimited vastness, one is always as distant from the beginning as from the end. The movement of society ultimately reduces to the movements of the individuals who are its constitutive elements. In view of this fact, we must ask what progress in itself can be determined for each of these beings whose total life span from birth to death is only a few years. Is it no more than that of a spark of light glancing off a pebble and vanishing instantly into the cold air?

The idea of progress must be understood in a much more qualified sense. The common meaning of this word has been passed down to us by the historian Gibbon, who states that "since the beginning of the world, each age has increasingly improved the material wealth, the happiness, the scientific knowledge, and perhaps the virtue of the human species."[1] This definition, which is somewhat questionable from the standpoint of moral evolution, has been adopted by modern writers and modified, expanded, or narrowed in various ways. In any case, the common view of the word "progress" is that it encompasses the general improvement of humanity throughout history. But it would be a mistake to attribute to every other epoch of life on earth an evolution analogous to that which contemporary humankind has experienced. There are quite plausible hypotheses dealing with the geological time of our planet that lend a great deal of support to the theory of a fluctuation of ages corresponding on a larger scale to the phenomenon of our alternating summers and winters. A back-and-forth motion encompassing thousands or millions of years or of centuries would result in a succession of distinct and contrasting periods in which life evolves in ways that are very different from one another. What would become of present-day humanity if there were another "great winter"—that is, if a new ice age were again to cover

[1] Gibbon, in the original, states: "We may therefore acquiesce in the pleasing conclusion that every age of the world has increased and still increases the real wealth, the happiness, the knowledge, and perhaps the virtue of the human race." Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (London and New York: Everyman's Library, 1910), 3:519.

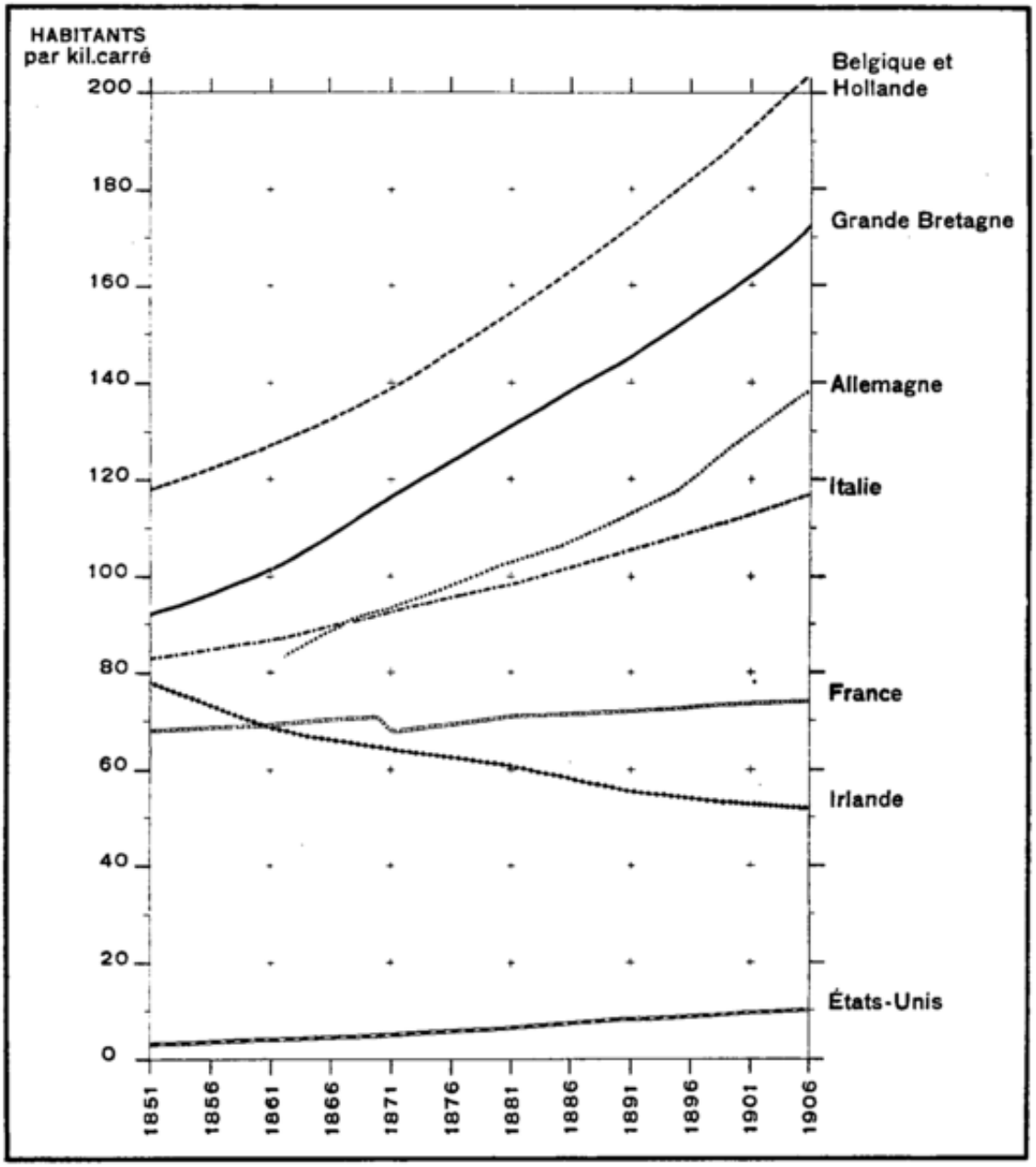
the British Isles and Scandinavia with a continuous sheet of ice, and our museums and libraries were to be destroyed by the severe cold? Would we simply have to hope that the two poles would not simultaneously become colder, and that man would be able to survive by gradually adapting to the new conditions and by moving the treasures of our present civilization to warmer climates? But if there were a widespread cooling, is it conceivable that an appreciable decrease in solar heat, which is the source of all life, and the gradual depletion of our energy resources, could permit continued improvement of culture or real progress? Today we are already able to confirm that the normal consequences of the drying of the earth following the ice age caused unquestionably regressive phenomena in regions of Central Asia. Dried-up rivers and lakes, and waves of invading dunes, brought with them the demise of cities, civilizations, and nations themselves. Sandy deserts replaced countryside and cities. Man was not able to hold his ground against a hostile nature.

Whatever conception we might have of progress, one point seems completely indisputable: in different epochs, certain individuals have emerged who, through some characteristic, have attained great prominence among men of all times and nations. One can think of scores of names of persons who, by their perspicacity, hard work, deep-seated goodness, moral virtue, artistic sensibility, or some other aspect of character or talent, constitute ideal and unsurpassable types in their particular sphere. The history of Greece in particular presents great examples, but other human groups have possessed them, as we have often surmised from myths and legends. Who could claim to be better than Shakyamuni, more artistic than Phidias, more inventive than Archimedes, or wiser than Marcus Aurelius? If there has been progress during the past three thousand years, it must consist of a greater diffusion of this initiative previously reserved for a few, and of a better utilization of gifted minds by society.

Some great thinkers are not satisfied with these fundamental restrictions in the concept of progress and furthermore deny that there could be any real improvement in the general state of humanity. According to them, the whole idea of progress is completely illusory and only has meaning from an individual point of view. Indeed, for most men, the fact of change is synonymous with either the idea of progress or that of regression, depending on its relative motion toward or away from the step occupied by the observer on the ladder of beings. The missionaries who encounter magnificent savages moving about freely in their nakedness believe that they will bring them "progress" by giving them dresses and shirts, shoes and hats, catechisms and Bibles, and by teaching them to chant psalms in English or Latin. And what triumphant songs in honor of progress have not been sung at the opening ceremonies of all the industrial plants with their adjoining taverns and hospitals![2] Certainly, industry brought real progress in its wake, but it is important to analyze scrupulously the details of this great evolution! The wretched populations of Lancashire and Silesia demonstrate that their histories were not a record of unadulterated progress. It is not enough to change one's circumstances and enter a new class in order to acquire a greater share of happiness. There are now millions of industrial workers, seamstresses, and servants who tearfully remember the thatched cottages of their childhoods, the outdoor dances under the ancestral tree, and the evening visits around the hearth. And what kind of "progress" is it for the people of Cameroon and of Togo to have henceforth the honor of being protected by the German flag, or for the Algerian Arabs to drink aperitifs and express themselves elegantly in Parisian slang?

[2] Havelock Ellis, *The Nineteenth Century.* [Reclus' note]

The word “civilization,” which is ordinarily used to indicate the progressive state of a particular nation, is, like the word “progress,” one of those vague expressions that confounds various meanings. For most individuals, it characterizes only the refinement of morals and, above all, those outward conventions of courtesy that merely prevent men of awkward bearing and rude manners from claiming moral superiority over courtiers playing their elegant madrigals. Others see in civilization only the sum total of material improvements due to science and modern industry. To them, railroads, telescopes and microscopes, telegraphs and telephones, dirigibles and flying machines, and other inventions seem sufficient evidence of the collective progress of society. They do not want to know anything beyond this or to probe into the depths of the great organism of society. But those who study it from its beginnings note that each “civilized” nation is composed of superimposed classes representing in this century all successive previous centuries with their corresponding intellectual and moral cultures. Present-day society contains within itself all past societies in the form of survivals, and when seen in close juxtaposition, their vastly differing conditions of life present a striking contrast.



No. 589. One of the aspects of Progress, variation in population density

Obviously, the word "progress" can cause the most unfortunate misunderstandings, depending on the meaning attributed to it by those who use it. Buddhists and the exegetes of their religion could number the various definitions of nirvana in the thousands. Likewise, philosophers, according to their ideals of life, are capable of viewing the most varied (and even the most contradictory) evolutions as examples of "moving forward." There are some for whom repose is the ultimate good, and they make a vow, if not for death, at least for perfect peace of body and mind and for "order," even if this consists of no more than routine. What these weary beings consider to be Progress is certainly looked upon as something entirely different for men preferring a perilous freedom to a peaceful servitude. However, the average view of progress is identical to that of Gibbon. It entails the improvement of physical being from the standpoint of health, material enrichment, the growth of knowledge, and finally the perfection of character, which becomes distinctly less cruel, more respectful of the individual, and perhaps more noble, generous, and dedicated. From this point of view, the progress of the individual merges with that of society, united by the force of an increasingly intimate solidarity.

In view of the uncertainty concerning the meaning of progress, it is important to study each historical fact from a sufficient distance so as not to become lost in the details, and to find the necessary vantage point from which to determine the true relationships to the whole of all the interconnected civilizations and peoples. There are examples of men of high intelligence who absolutely deny not only progress but even any concept of a sustained evolution for the better. Ranke, though otherwise a historian of great value, sees in history only successive periods, each having its own peculiar character and manifesting itself through various tendencies that give a distinct, unexpected, and even "piquant"[3] life to the different tableaux of each epoch and each people.[4] According to this conception, the world appears as a sort of picture gallery. If there were progress, says the pietist writer, men would be assured of improvement from century to century, and they would therefore not be "directly dependent on the divinity," who sees all successive generations in the course of time with an impartial eye, as if their relative value were exactly equal. Ranke's opinion goes against those usually encountered since the eighteenth century and justifies once more the observation of Guyau that "the idea of progress is antagonistic to that of religion."[5] Because of the sovereign authority of gods and dogmas that lasted through the ancient and medieval ages, this idea of progress remained dormant for a long time, hardly awakened by the most open-minded philosophers of the ancient world, and came to life with full self-consciousness only with the Renaissance and the period of modern revolutions. Indeed, all religion proceeds from the principle that the universe emerged from the hands of a creator; in other words, that it had its origin in supreme perfection. As the Bible states, God looked at his work and saw that it was "good," and even "very good."[6] Following this original state marked by the seal of divinity, the movement resulting from the actions of imperfect men could only continue toward decline and fall; regression was inevitable. After the Golden Age, these

[3] "Die Historie bekommt einen eigenthümlichen Reiz," *Weltgeschichte*, Neunter Theil, II, 4, 5, 6, etc. [Reclus' note]

[4] Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886), perhaps the most famous German historian, is known as a founder of the modern objective school of historical study, which focused on the rigorous examination of primary sources. His social views were conservative and nationalistic.

[5] M. Guyau, *Morale d'Epicure*, 153 et seq. [Reclus' note] Jean-Marie Guyau (1854–88) was French philosopher, poet, translator, and educator, known for his writings on ethics, aesthetics, religion, and various philosophical topics. He gained many admirers, including Nietzsche, before his early death.

[6] Genesis I:10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31. [Reclus' note]

creatures ended up falling into the Iron Age. They left the paradise where they had lived happily, to be engulfed by the waters of the Flood, from which they emerged only to lead thereafter an aimless life.

Moreover, the entrenched institutions of monarchy and aristocracy, and all the official and exclusive creeds founded and masoned, so to speak, by men who claimed, and indeed were even certain, that they had achieved perfection, presupposed that all revolution and all change must be a fall, a return to barbarism. These ancestors and forefathers, glorifiers of "the olden days," played a large role along with gods and kings in the denigration of the present relative to the past and in the creation of a prejudice that regression is inevitable. Children have a natural tendency to regard their parents as superior beings, and these parents have in turn done the same. Such attitudes have been successively deposited in minds like alluvial soil on the banks of a river, and have consequently created a veritable dogma of man's irremediable fall from grace. Even in our time, is it not a widespread practice to hold forth in prose or verse on "the depravity of our century"? For example, the same people who praise the "inevitable progress of humanity" speak readily of its "decline," thus showing a complete (though nearly unconscious) lack of logic. Two contrary currents intersect in their speech as well as in their views. Indeed, previously held notions collide with new ones, even among reflective persons who do not speak unthinkingly. Though the weakening of religions is interrupted by sudden revivals, they must nevertheless succumb to the force of theories that explain the formation of the world by slow evolution, the gradual emergence of things from primitive chaos. And what is this phenomenon if not by definition progress itself—whether acknowledged implicitly, as by Aristotle, or in precise, eloquent words, as by Lucretius?[7]

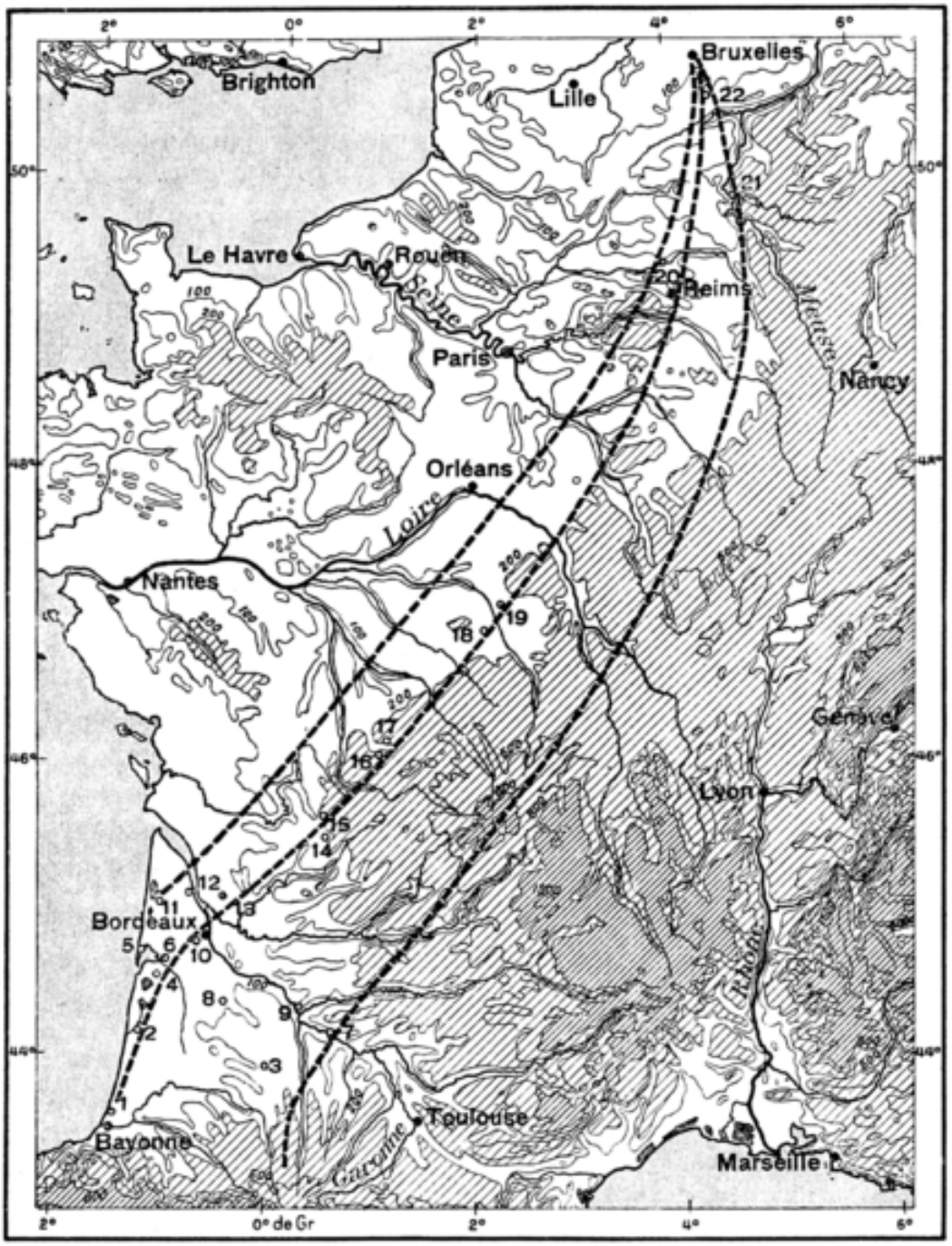
The idea that there has been progress during the brief span of each human generation and in the whole of human evolution owes its persuasiveness largely to geological research, which has revealed in the succession of phenomena, if not a "divine plan," as it was once called, a natural evolution that gradually refines life by means of increasingly complex organisms. Thus the first life-forms whose remains or traces can be seen in the most ancient strata of the earth present rudimentary, uniform, and scarcely differentiated features, and constitute increasingly successful sketches of species that appear in subsequent ages. Leafy plants come after leafless ones; vertebrates follow invertebrates; brains develop from era to era; and man, the last to come with the exception of his own parasites,[8] is alone among all the animals to have acquired through speech the complete liberty of expressing thoughts, and through fire the power to transform nature.

When we look at the more restricted field of the written history of nations, general progress does not seem so clearly evident. Many defeatists found evidence that humanity does not progress at all, but only shifts, gaining on one side and losing on the other, rising through certain peoples and decaying through others. During the very epoch in which the most optimistic sociologists were preparing the way for the French Revolution in the name of the continuous progress of man, other writers, impressed by the tales of explorers who had been seduced by the simple life of distant peoples, spoke of returning to the mode of existence of these primitives. "Return to nature" was the cry of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. It is strange that this call, however contrary to that of the "Rights of Man and of the Republican," found its way into the language

[7] Guyau, *Morale d'Epicure*, 157. [Reclus' note]

[8] Elie Metchnikoff. *Etudes sur la nature humaine.* [Reclus' note]

and ideas of the time. The revolutionaries wanted simultaneously to return to the era of Rome and of Sparta, as well as to the happy and pure ages of prehistoric tribes.



No. 590. Gradual conquest of the Atmosphere.

This map is at a scale of 1 to 6,000,000.

Only non-dirigible balloons are concerned here. On September 15, 1907, in a distance contest, 22 balloons left Brussels and landed at the points accompanied by a serial number. The three lines indicate the winner's route (917 kilometers), followed almost identically by many competitors, and those of the two balloons which deviated the most. Fifteen pilots made a journey of more than 600 kilometers and three crossed the Garonne [river] exactly at the same point.

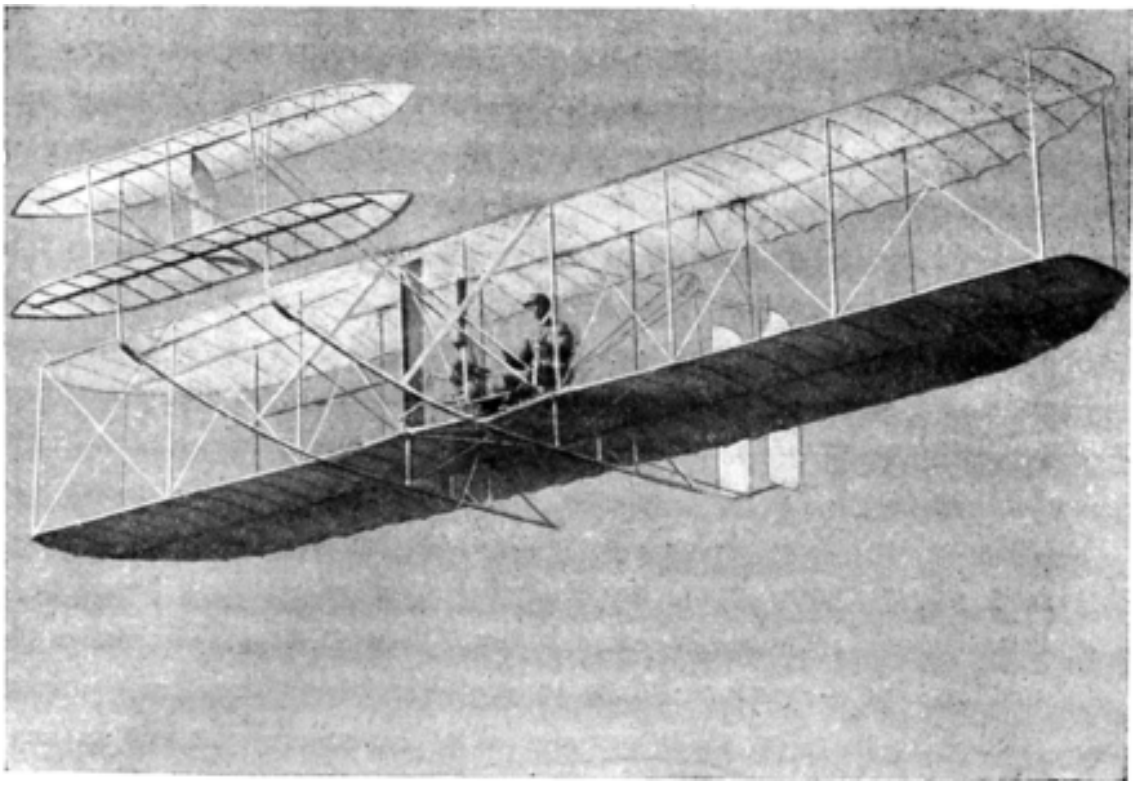
In our time, a trend analogous to the "return to nature" movement has emerged, and even more earnestly than in the time of Rousseau. The reason is that current society, which has expanded to the point of including all of humanity, tends to assimilate more intimately the heterogeneous ethnic components from which progressive civilizations remained separated for a long time. Moreover, anthropological studies of the psychology of our primitive brothers have made enormous strides, and the greatest explorers have added to the discussion the decisive weight of their testimony.

We no longer have to rely on such simple and naïve stories as those of Jean de Léry, Claude d'Abbeville, or Yves d'Evreux about the Tupinambá and other Brazilian savages, stories that nevertheless deserve to be greatly appreciated. We also have better statements than the hasty observations of Cook and Bougainville, for the chronicles are now replete with very scrupulous testimonials drawn from long experience. Among the tribes that must undeniably be ranked very highly among men who are closest to the ideal of mutual aid and brotherly love, we must definitely count the Aeta, classified among the primitives, who gave their name "Negros" to one of the Philippine islands.

In spite of all the evils that the whites have done to them, these "Negritos" or "little Negroes" have remained gentle and benevolent toward their persecutors, and it is among them that the virtues of the race are most evident. All members of the tribe think of themselves as brothers, so that when a child is born, the entire extended family gathers to decide on an auspicious name with which to greet the newborn. Their marriages, which are invariably monogamous, depend on the free will of the spouses. The sick, the children, and the elderly are cared for with perfect devotion. No one exerts power, yet all bow willingly to the elderly to show respect for their experience and advanced age.[9] Is there any country in Europe or America that deserves praise equal to this? But we must wonder whether this humble society of the good Aeta still exists. Has it been able to preserve its dwellings of woven branches, its huts of reeds or palms, against the great American hunting party?[10]

[9] Semper, *Die Philippinen und ihre Bewohner*; F. Blumentritt, *Versuch einer Ethnographie der Philippinen*; Ergänzungsheft zu den Pet. Mit., No. 67. [Reclus' note]

[10] Reclus refers to the Philippine war for independence from the United States. The revolt began in February 1899 and lasted for almost three years. During the war, large segments of the population were slaughtered in some provinces, and entire populations of some towns were wiped out by battle and disease. This war has been systematically ignored by mainstream historians. See Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), 305–15.



Cl. Publ. Pierre Lafitte.
WILBUR WRIGHT, IN HIS AIRPLANE
Document taken from Vie au Grand Air. *The Wright brothers' first flight, in a motorized device, was on December 17, 1903.*

Let us take another example from men who have a wider horizon, among populations that are closer to the white race and whose very way of life compels them to pass a large part of their existence away from the maternal hut. The Unangin, referred to by the Russians as the Aleuts after the name of the islands that they inhabit, live in a region of rain, wind, and storms. In order to adapt to their surroundings, they build huts that are half underground, constructed mostly of woven branches covered by a shell of hardened mud and illuminated at the top by a large lens of ice. The necessity of obtaining food has made these Aleuts a fishing people, skilled at maneuvering boats of stretched skins, which they enter as if into a drum. The dangerous seas that they travel have made them intrepid seamen and gifted foreseers of storms. Some of them, especially the whalers, become true naturalists and constitute a special guild whose members are required for initiation to endure a long period of ordeals.[11] The Aleuts, like their neighbors on the mainland, are extraordinarily skillful sculptors, and fascinating objects have been discovered in their burial sites under vaults of rocks. The complexity of Aleut life is also evident in their code of social decorum, which is strictly regulated by custom among blood relatives, relations by marriage, and strangers. Having attained this relatively high degree of civilization, the Aleuts remained, thanks to their isolation, in a state of peace and perfect social equilibrium until a recent period. The first European explorers who made contact with them unanimously praised their good qualities and virtues. Archbishop Innokenti (better known by the name Veniaminov), who witnessed their way of life for ten years, depicted them as "the most affectionate of men" and as beings of incomparable modesty and discretion who are never guilty of the slightest violence in word or deed: "During our years of living together, not one ill-mannered word passed their lips." In this respect, there is certainly no comparison between our people of Western Europe and the little tribe of the Aleutians! The spirit of solidarity and the dignity of moral life among these islanders was so great that some Greek Orthodox missionaries decided not to try to convert them: "What good would it do to teach them our prayers? They are better than we are."[12]

To these examples, chosen from various stages of civilization, can be added equally significant ones from the travels of sociologists and from specialized works in ethnology. Numerous cases can be found in which there is both moral superiority and a more serene appreciation of life among so-called savage or barbarous societies, although these are greatly inferior to ours in the intellectual understanding of things. In the unending spiral that humanity ceaselessly travels, in evolving upon itself in a continuous motion that is roughly comparable to the rotation of the earth, it often happens that certain parts of the larger whole are much closer than others to the ideal focus of the orbit. Perhaps some day the law governing this back-and-forth motion will be understood precisely. For now, it is enough to note the simple facts without drawing premature conclusions and, above all, without accepting the paradoxical views of gloomy sociologists who see in the material progress of humanity only evidence of its actual decline.

Great minds seem at times to have succumbed to this outlook. The following memorable passage from *Malay Archipelago*, published in 1869 by A.R. Wallace, might actually be regarded as a sort of manifesto, a challenge to the ingenuity of those who would unconditionally defend the theory of the continuous progress of humanity. This challenge still awaits a reply. It may be useful to recall his words and to take them as a standard by which to judge historical studies:

[11] Alphonse Pinard, *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie*, Dec. 1873. [Reclus' note]

[12] A. Bastian, *Rechtszustände*. [Reclus' note]

> What is this ideally perfect social state towards which mankind ever has been, and still is tending? Our best thinkers maintain, that it is a state of individual freedom and self-government, rendered possible by the equal development and just balance of the intellectual, moral, and physical parts of our nature,—a state in which we shall each be so perfectly fitted for a social existence, by knowing what is right, and at the same time feeling an irresistible impulse to do what we know to be right., that all laws and all punishments shall be unnecessary… Now it is very remarkable, that among people in a very low stage of civilization, we find some approach to such a perfect social state. I have lived with communities of savages in South America and in the East, who have no laws or law courts but the public opinion of the village freely expressed. Each man scrupulously respects the rights of his fellow, and any infraction of those rights rarely or never takes place. In such a community, all are nearly equal. There are none of those wide distinctions, of education and ignorance, wealth and poverty, master and servant, which are the product of our civilization; there is none of that wide-spread division of labor, which, while it increases wealth, products also conflicting interests; there is not that severe competition and struggle for existence… [W]e shall never, as regards the whole community, attain to any real or important superiority over the better class of savages.[13]

But it would be wrong to generalize the observations made by the great naturalist and sociologist about the indigenous peoples of the Amazon and of the Insulindes,[14] and to apply them to all the savage populations of every continent and archipelago. The island of Borneo, where Wallace's view was shaped by so many examples of this moral nobility, is the same great land that Boek has described as the "Land of the Cannibals."[15] One could also call it the "Land of the Headhunters," referring to the men of Dayak who, in order to earn the right to call themselves "men" and to start a family, must chop off one or more heads, whether through trickery or in fair combat. Likewise, the wonderful island of Tahiti, the New Cythera of which eighteenth-century explorers spoke with such naïve enthusiasm, only partly merits the praise of the Europeans who were delighted by both the beauty of the countryside and the friendliness of the inhabitants. Certain august and gentle dignitaries and venerable elders, who in their noble gravity seemed to complete the charming picture of an oceanic paradise, may have belonged to the formidable caste of the Oro (Arioï), which, after having constituted a celibate clergy, became in the end an association of murderers indulging in the infernal rites of killing all their children. It is true that at this point the Tahitians had already reached a level of cultural evolution far beyond the primitive stage. But does this period represent a regression, rather than a development in the direction of progress? Or did the two movements converge in the social life of this little nation locked in its narrow oceanic universe?

Herein lies the main difficulty. Thousands of tribes and other ethnic groupings, lumped together under the name "savages" by haughty "civilized" people, correspond to distinct points that are very different from one another, spaced variously along the path of time and within the

[13] Alfred Russel Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago: The land of the orang-utan, and the bird of paradise. A narrative of travel, with studies of man and nature* (New York: Harper and Brother, 1885), 598.

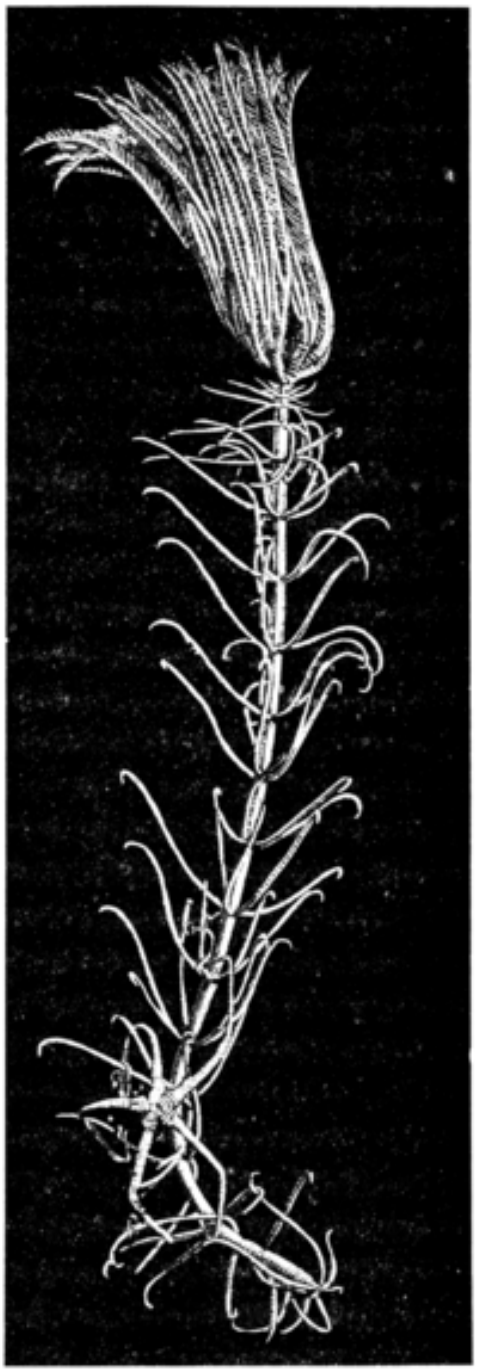
[14] Islands of Asia west of New Guinea, north of Australia, south of the South China Sea; these include Indonesia, Melanesia, and often the Philippines.

[15] *Unter den Kannibalen auf Borneo.* [Reclus' note]

infinite network of environments. One tribe is in the middle of a progressive evolution, while the other is obviously in decline. One is in a state of becoming, the other on the road to decay and death. Each of the examples presented by various authors engaged in the general investigation of progress should thus be accompanied by the particular history of the human group in question, for two situations that seem to be almost identical can have an absolutely opposite meaning if the one corresponds to the infancy of an organism and the other to its old age.

One primary fact clearly stands out in comparative ethnographic studies: the essential difference between the civilization of a primitive tribe that is yet only slightly influenced by its neighbors, and the civilization of immense, modern political societies with their unbridled ambition, consists of the simple character of the former and of the complex character of the latter. The first, though not highly developed, at least has the advantage of being coherent and consistent with its ideals. The second is vast, owing to the scope it encompasses, and is infinitely superior to primitive culture in terms of the forces it sets in motion. It is complex and diverse, burdened with survivals from the past, and necessarily incoherent and contradictory. It lacks unity and pursues opposing objectives simultaneously. In prehistoric societies and in those of the world still considered savage, a balance can very easily be established because their ideal is simple.[16] Accordingly, such tribes and primitive races, which have developed very little scientific knowledge, possess only rudimentary crafts and lead a life without much variety; nevertheless, they have been able to attain a level of mutual justice, equitable well-being, and happiness greatly surpassing the corresponding characteristics of our modern societies. The latter are infinitely complex, and are swept along through discoveries and partial progressions in a continual momentum of renewal that blends in various ways with all of the factors from the past. Also, when we compare our powerful, global society to the small, almost unnoticeable groups of primitives who have managed to maintain themselves apart from the "civilizers"—who are all too often destroyers—we might be led to conclude that these primitives are superior to us and that we have regressed over the course of time. But our acquired qualities are not of the same order as the ancient ones, so it is very difficult to make an equitable comparison. Society has greatly increased its baggage since primitive times. In any case, it is very agreeable to focus on the dozens or hundreds of individuals who have developed harmoniously within the limits of their narrow cosmos, and who were fortunate enough to realize on a small scale that which we are now trying to accomplish at the level of the entire human universe. In societies in which all know each other as members of the same family, the desired goal is near at hand. It is different for our modern society, which encompasses a world but does not yet embrace it.

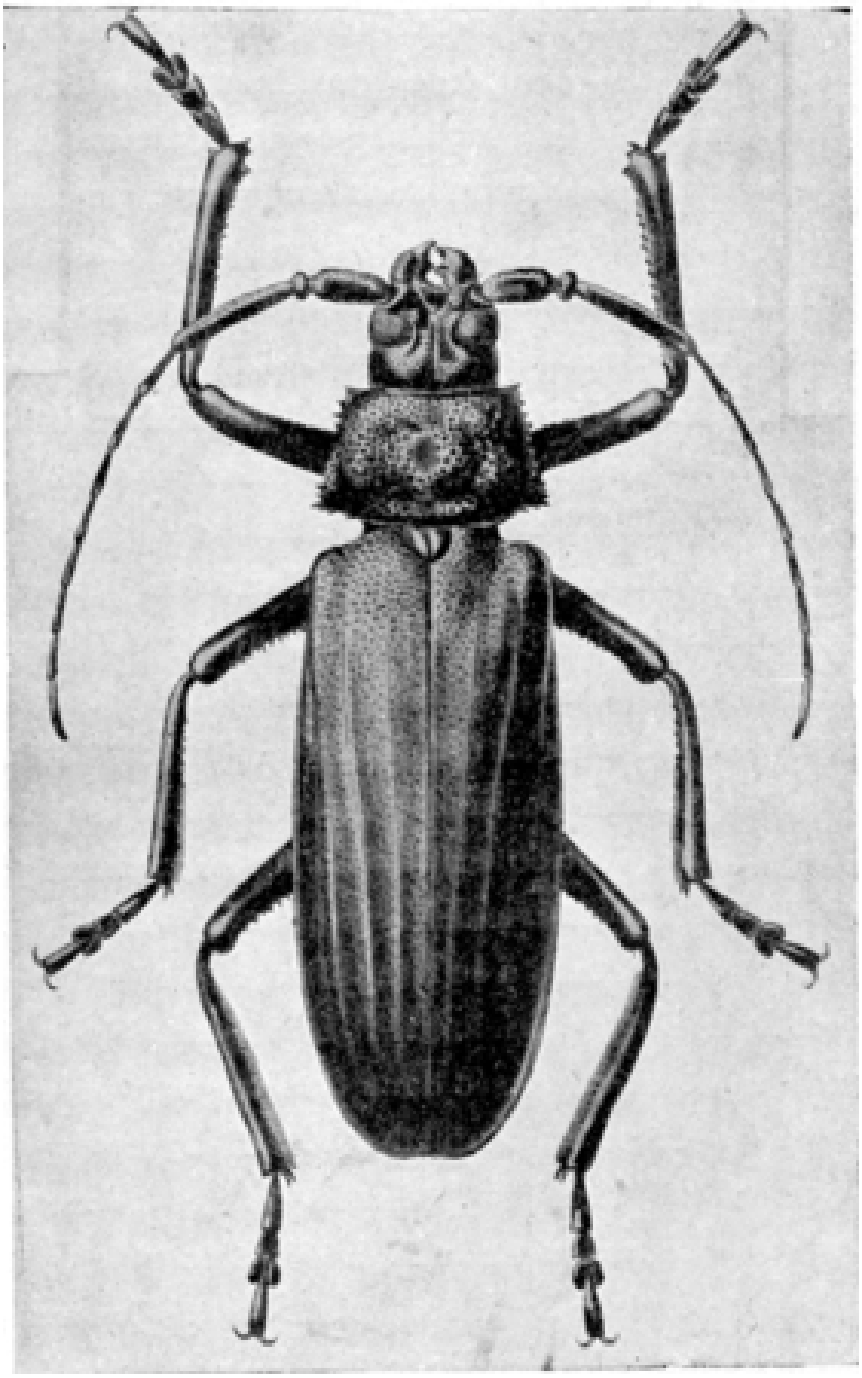
[16] Guillaume de Greef, *Sociologie générale élémentaire*, leçon XI, 39. [Reclus' note]



A CRINOID, PENTACRINUS ASTERIA
A quarter of natural size.
(See page 518)

If we look at humanity in its entirety, and even return to the origins of living beings, we can regard all social groupings as normally forming small, distinct colonies, from the floating ribbons of salpa on the sea, to the swarms of bees that gather at the same hive, to peoples who seek to demarcate themselves precisely within borders. The earliest groupings are microcosmic, and then they become more and more extended and increasingly complex over time, to the degree that an ideal arises and becomes more difficult to achieve. Each of these small societies constitutes by nature an independent and self-sufficient organism. However, none of them are completely closed, except for those that are isolated on islands, peninsulas, or in mountain cirques whose access has been cut off. As groups of men encounter one another, direct and indirect relations arise. In this way, following internal changes and external events, each swarm ends its particular, individual evolution and joins willingly or forcibly with another body politic so that both are integrated into a superior organization with a new course of life and of progress before it. This metamorphosis is analogous to that by which a seed changes into a tree, or an egg into an animal: there is a transformation from homogeneous to heterogeneous structure.[17] But diverse outcomes are possible. Among small, isolated societies, a great number perish from senile exhaustion through a bloody conflict before realizing the more or less exalted end toward which their normal functioning tends. Other microcosms, having an environment more conducive to their harmonious development, are able to attain their ideal successfully and live according to the rules of wisdom established by their ancestors. Thus a number of tribes that had a simple social organization and a naïve general conception of the universe, and that were free from mixture with other ethnic components, succeeded in constituting small cells of perfected form and well-arranged organs. Each individual was conscious of his solidarity with all the other members of the tribe and enjoyed through each individual an absolutely respected personal liberty, an inviolate justice, and a calm and tranquil life. These tribes have come close to the state that one could call "happiness" if this word were to imply only the satisfaction of instincts, appetites, and feelings of affection.

[17] De Baer, Herbert Spencer, etc. [Reclus' note]



Cl. Sevria.
MACROTOMA COLMANTI (LAMEERE)
Northern Congo beetle. — Four-thirds of natural size.
(See page 518.)

In the history of humanity, several social types have successively reached their full blossoming. Similarly, among the more ancient worlds of flora and fauna, numerous genera and species have reached such ideals of strength, rhythm, or beauty that nothing superior to them can be imagined. While the rose is the precursor of many subsequent forms, it is no less perfect or insurpassable for it. And among animals, is it possible to imagine any organisms more definitive, each of their kind, than crinoids, beetles, swallows, antelopes, bees, and ants?[18] Is man, still imperfect in his own eyes, not surrounded by countless living beings that he can admire unreservedly if he has open eyes and an open mind? And even if he chooses among the infinite number of types around him, does he not in reality do so through his inability to embrace everything? For each form, epitomizing in itself all of the laws of the universe that converge to determine it, is an equally marvelous consequence of this process.

Therefore, modern society can lay claim to a particular superiority over the societies that preceded it only through the greater complexity of the elements that enter into its formation. It has a greater scope and constitutes a more heterogeneous organism through the successive assimilation of juxtaposed organisms. But on the other hand, this vast society tends to become more simplified. It seeks to realize human unity by gradually becoming the repository of everything achieved from labor and thought in all countries and all ages. Whereas the various tribes living separately represent diversity, the nation whose aim is preeminence over and even the absorption of other ethnic groups tends to achieve great unity. In effect, it seeks to benefit by the resolution of all conflicts, and to create one unified truth out of all the small, scattered truths. But the road that leads to this goal is very difficult, full of obstacles, and, above all, criss-crossed with deceptive paths that seem at first to be parallel to the main route that we fearlessly take! History has shown us how each nation, no matter how well endowed, strong, and healthy it may be in its prime, ends up lagging behind after a number of decades or centuries and then disintegrates into smaller bands that wander off, scattering across the surrounding countryside. Sometimes it even tries to return to its origins, but the diversity of languages, of factions, and of local interests prevails over the feeling of human unity, which for a time sustains the nation in its progress.

In our time, the idea of human unity has so deeply penetrated various civilized ethnic groups that they are, so to speak, immunized against decline and death. Barring great cosmic revolutions whose shadows have yet to fall over us, modern nations will in the future escape the phenomena of seemingly final ruin that occurred to so many ancient peoples. Certainly, political "transgressions," analogous to marine transgressions on coastlines, will occur on the borders of states, and these borders themselves will disappear in many places, prefiguring the day when they will cease to exist everywhere. Various geographical names will be erased from maps, but despite such changes, the peoples encompassed by modern civilization (which covers a very considerable portion of the earth's land surface) will certainly continue to participate in the material, intellectual, and moral progress of one another. They are in the era of mutual aid, and even when they engage in bloody conflicts with each other, they do not stop working in part for the common welfare. During the last great European war between France and Germany, hundreds of thousands of men perished, crops were devastated, and wealth was destroyed. Each side despised and damned the other, but that did not in the least prevent either side from continuing the labor of thought for the benefit of all men, including mutual enemies. There were patriotic disputes over whether the diphtheria serum had been effectively discovered and applied for the

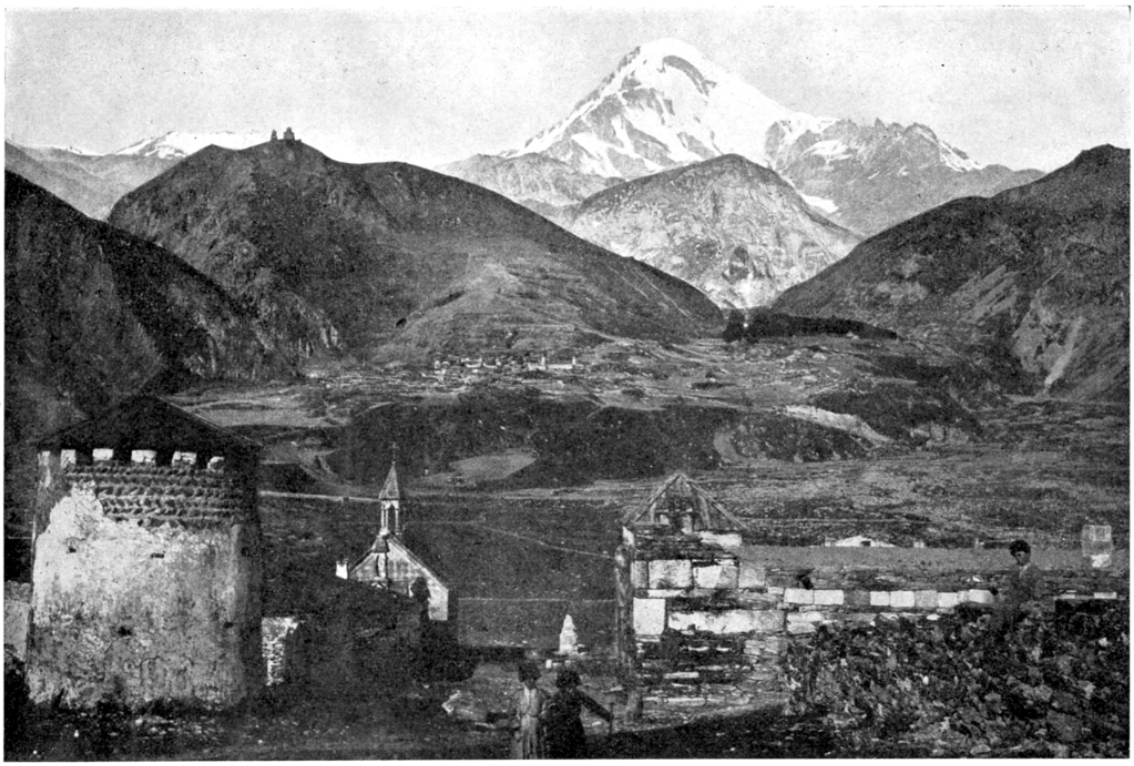
[18] H. Drummond, *Ascent of Man.* [Reclus' note]

first time to the east or west of the Vosges, but in France as in Germany, the medicine increased the power of a unified humanity over an indifferent nature. In a similar way, a thousand other new inventions have become the common heritage of the two neighboring nations—rivals and enemies, it is true, but still fundamentally very close friends since they engage relentlessly in broader work for the benefit of all men. And in the Far East, one finds that the covert or overt war between Japan and Russia cannot stop the astonishing progress that is being accomplished in this part of the world through the sharing of human culture and ideals. A historical period has already earned the name of "humanism" because at that time the study of Greek and Latin classics united all refined men in the common appreciation of great thoughts expressed in fine language. Our epoch is even more deserving of such a name since today it is not only a brotherhood of intellectuals who are joined together but also entire nations descended from the most diverse races and peopling the most distant parts of the world!

Yet in our time, a fatuous humanitarianism [*humanitairerie*] is quite prevalent. All statesmen and great writers make fun of this poor sentimentality. The second half of the nineteenth century was fertile in theories about the forms progress sometimes takes. For example, the revolutionaries of 1848 proclaimed with extraordinary brilliance the idea of "humanity." But in their profound ignorance, these brave souls had no idea of the difficulties that their propaganda would have to encounter, and, moreover, it was easy after their defeat to ridicule them. Then came the FrancoPrussian War, the crowning glory of Bismarckian politics, which came to fruition in a sentimental Germany. Everyone vied with one another to imitate, with equal ineptitude, the machinations of the Iron Chancellor, whose shadow still looms over us. The liberation of Greece and the Two Sicilies,[19] and the acclaim that greeted Byron, Kossuth, Garibaldi, and Herzen was followed by the most restrained conduct in response to the massacres in Armenia, the slaughter in eastern Africa, and the pogroms of Russia.[20] A passionate nationalism rages in all western countries, and existing borders have for the most part been tightened during the past fifty years. We have also seen in Great Britain the republican idea, which united many supporters before 1870, gradually fade from the political scene. It is the same in all civilized countries for the most idealistic of "utopias." One can thus become discouraged by classifying these distinct evolutions as definite regressions if one does not also investigate their causes. Once it is understood how this movement of reversal functions, there can be no doubt that the cry of humanity will once again resound when the "weak and the downtrodden" (who have never stopped proclaiming this ideal among themselves) will have acquired a thorough scientific knowledge. Having attained a more complete mastery of international understanding, they will feel strong enough to abolish forever all threat of war.

[19] A former kingdom including Naples (with lower Italy) and Sicily; it united with the kingdom of Italy in 1861.

[20] Reclus refers to several figures of his time who were associated with revolution. The first is the well-known English Romantic poet George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788–1824). In 1823, Byron sailed to Greece to devote his energies and resources to the cause of Greek independence from Turkey. Lajos Kossuth (1802–94) was the leader of the Hungarian movement for independence from Austria and the end of serfdom. He was president of the short-lived Hungarian Republic in 1859. Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807–82) was an Italian revolutionary and nationalist leader. He was major figure in Italian unification and a popular hero. Alexander Herzen (1812–70) was a Russian revolutionary, journalist, and writer. He saw the Russian peasant communes as the precursor of future socialism.



Photochrom Cl.
THE KASBEK, SEEN FROM THE ARAGVA VALLEY, TO THE SOUTH

Conflicts between rival governments can be serious and full of repercussions; however, even when these disputes lead to war, they cannot have results analogous to those of the struggles that long ago destroyed the Hittites, the Elamites, the Sumerians and Akkadians, the Assyrians, the Persians, and before them so many civilizations whose very names are unknown to us. In reality, all nations, including those that call themselves enemies, and in spite of their leaders and the survival of hatreds, form but one single nation in which all local progress reacts upon the whole, thus contributing to general progress. Those whom the "unknown philosopher" of the eighteenth century called "men of desire"—in other words, men who desire good and who work toward its realization—are already sufficiently numerous, active, and harmoniously grouped into one moral nation for their labor of progress to prevail over the elements of regression and separation produced by surviving hatreds.

It is this new nation, composed of free individuals, independent from one another but nonetheless amicable and unified, that must be addressed. It is to this humanity in formation that we must direct propaganda on behalf of all the reforms that are desired and all the ideas that seem just and renewing. This great nation has expanded to all corners of the earth, and it is because it is already aware of itself that it feels the need for a common language. It is not acceptable that these new fellow citizens should merely speculate about one another from one end of the earth to the other—they must understand each other completely. We can be confident that the language that we hope for will come into being: every strongly willed ideal can be realized.

This spontaneous union across borders of men of good will removes all authority from certain falsely named "laws" that were generalized from previous historical evolution and that now deserve to be relegated to the past as having had only relative truth. One example is the theory according to which civilization was supposed to have made its way around the earth from east to west, like the sun, and determined its focus from millennium to millennium on the circumference of the planet. Some historians, struck by the elegant parabola traced by the spread of civilization between ancient Babylon and our modern Babylons, formulated this law of the precession of culture; however, before the flowering of Hellenic culture, the Egyptians, in seeking to comprehend the vastness of their Nilotic world, a true universe unto itself by virtue of its extent and its isolation, attributed a quite different direction to the propagation of human thought. They believed that it had come to them from south to north, carried like fertile alluvial soils by the waters of the Nile. They were probably wrong, and in at least one known historical epoch, civilization spread in the opposite direction, from Memphis toward Thebes with its "Hundred Doors."[21] In other lands, the movement of culture proceeds downstream along rivers and successively gives rise to populous cities that are centers of human labor. Similarly, in India the trajectory is from northwest to southeast along the banks of the Ganges and the Jamuna, and on the vast plains of China, the "line of life" clearly travels from east to west through the valleys of the Huang He and the Chang Jiang.

These examples suffice to show that the so-called law of progress determining the successive transfer of the predominant global focus of progress from east to west has only a provisional and localized validity, and that other serial movements have prevailed in various regions, depending on the slope of the terrain and the forces of attraction produced by environmental conditions.[22]

[21] The "Hundred Doors" refers to the "doors" of the numerous tombs in the Theban Valley of the Kings in Egypt.

[22] See Chapter VI, Book 1. [Reclus' note] Reclus refers to *L'Homme et la Terre* (Paris: Librairie Universelle, 1905–8), 1:321–54.

Nevertheless, it is good to recall the classic thesis, not only in order to understand the causes that gave rise to it, but also because it is still invoked by an ambitious nation of the "Great West," which loudly proclaims its right to preeminence.[23] But has it not become obvious to the members of the great human family that the center of civilization is already everywhere, by virtue of a thousand discoveries and their applications that occur every day in one place or another and then spread immediately from city to city across the surface of the earth? The imaginary lines that history once traced over the globe have been submerged, so to speak, by the waves of the deluge that now covers all countries. This deluge is really the flood of knowledge that the gospel says (albeit from a different point of view) ought to spread equally over all parts of the earth. The element of distance has lost its importance, for man can and indeed does educate himself about all the phenomena relating to soil, climate, history, and society that distinguish different countries. Now to understand one another is to be already associated, to be intermingled to a certain extent. Certainly, there are still contrasts between different lands and different nations, but these contrasts are diminishing and tend gradually to be neutralized in the minds of the well-informed. The focus of civilization is wherever one thinks or acts. It is in the laboratory in Japan, Germany, or America where the properties of a particular metal or chemical substance are discovered, in the plant where propellers for ships or aircraft are built, or in the observatory where previously unknown data concerning the movement of the stars are recorded.

[23] Reclus has in mind the United States and its famous doctrine of "Manifest Destiny." According to this theory, the American state was preordained by God and history to extend its dominion westward from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

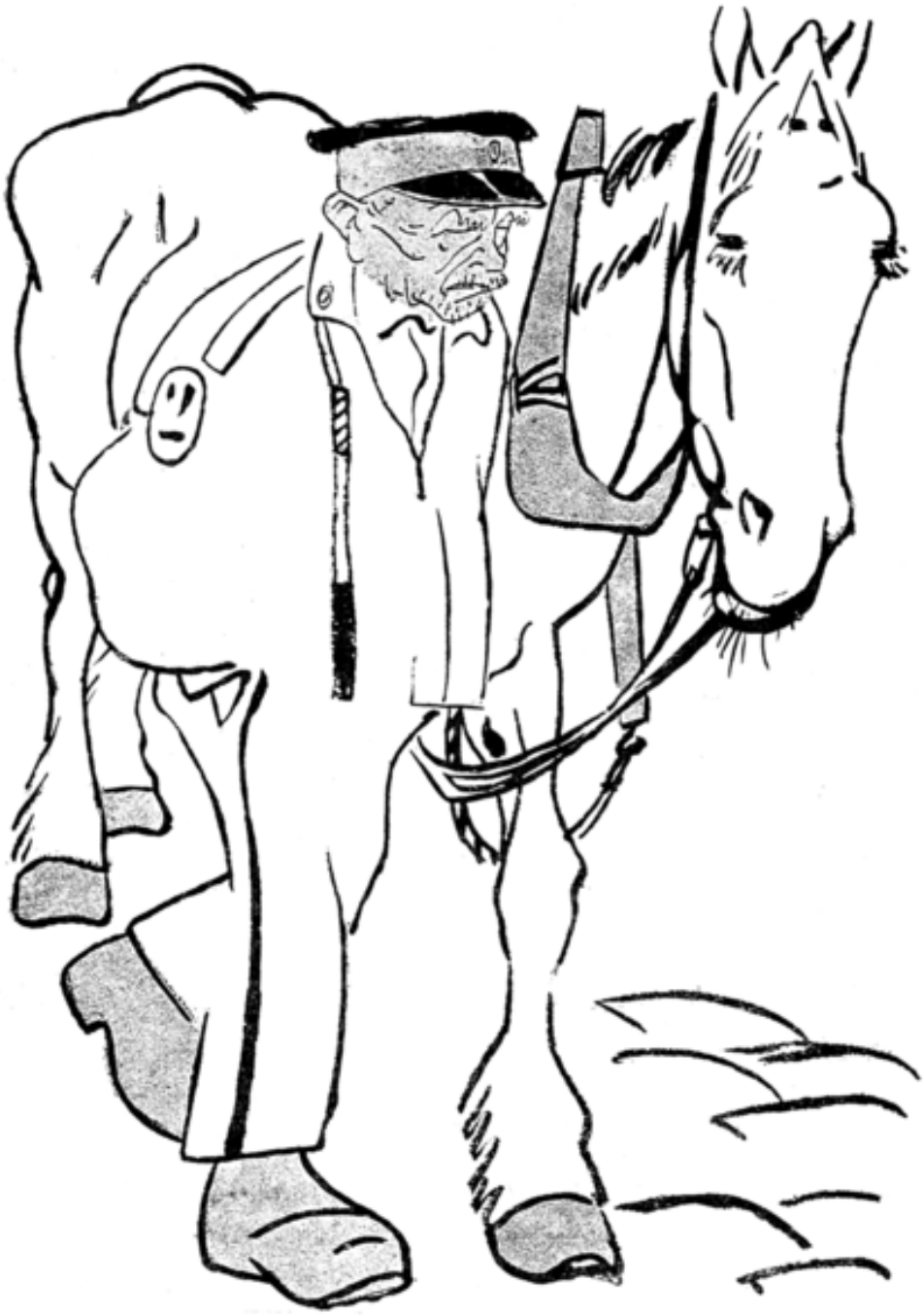
Appalachia Cl.
MOUNT DAWNSON, SELKIRK MOUNTAINS, BRITISH COLUMBIA
The summit of this mountain, 3,400 meters, was first reached on August 13, 1899, by Charles E. Fay, Christian Häsler, Edouard Feuz and H. C. Parker. *(See page 537.)*

The once-famous theory of Vico on the *corsi* and *ricorsi* (ebb and flow) of historical evolution is now as much out of favor as the theory of the successive displacement of centers of culture. A closed society behaving like a single individual would no doubt have a natural tendency to develop according to rhythmic oscillations, with periods of activity following periods of rest, and, whenever the process would resume, the action of the same elements under similar conditions would bring about an almost identical operation. The alternation from democracy to a tyrannical regime and from tyranny back to popular government would thus occur with a swinging motion similar to that of a clock's pendulum. But as our knowledge of history grows, and as ethnic factors become more influential in various ways, we see that such rhythmic alternation of events is inevitably disturbed: the ebb and flow take on such amplitude and merge in such a varying manner that they cannot clearly be distinguished. It was largely to establish the proper relationship between them that the two-dimensional model of Vico's swinging pendulum was replaced by an infinite curve ascending in spirals. Here is just the sort of poetic image that Goethe was fond of sketching; however, it corresponds only vaguely to reality. It is true that when the infinite entanglement of historical facts is studied from a distance, they seem to form themselves into large masses. But beneath the surface there is a constant movement of action and reaction, and the sum of the various conflicting forces can never carry humanity along a straight line. The whole of this vast profusion certainly does not lack harmonious development, and there are remarkable regularities in the thousand changing details of its scenes. But however elegant geometrical forms may seem, they cannot give an adequate idea of its endless undulations.

The extension of the scope of research, which increases through revolutions and the passage of time, constitutes one of the principal elements of progress. Self-conscious humanity has grown continuously in proportion to the geographical assimilation of distant lands into the realm of those already scientifically examined. Whereas the explorer conquers space, thus allowing men of good will to unite their efforts throughout the world, the historian, turning toward the past, conquers time. Humankind, which makes itself One at every latitude and longitude, similarly tries to realize itself through one form that encompasses all ages. This is a conquest no less important than the first. All past civilizations, even those of prehistory, offer us a glimpse of the treasure of their secrets and, in a certain sense, are gradually merging into the life of present-day societies. We can now look back on the succession of epochs as one synoptic scene that plays out according to an order in which we can seek to discover the logic of events. In doing so, we cease to live solely in the fleeting moment, and instead embrace the whole series of past ages recorded in the annals of history and discovered by archeologists. In this way, we manage to free ourselves from the strict line of development determined by the environment that we inhabit and by the specific lineage of our race. Before us lies the infinite network of parallel, diverging, and intersecting roads that other segments of humanity have followed. And throughout this series of epochs stretching out toward an indefinite horizon, we find examples that appeal to our spirit of imitation. Everywhere we see brothers toward whom we feel a growing spirit of solidarity. As our overview of history extends ever further into the past, we find an increasing number of models demanding understanding, including many that awaken in us the ambition to imitate some aspect of their ideal. As humanity became more mobile and modified itself in the most diverse ways, it lost a significant part of its achievements attained in the past. Today, we may ask whether it is possible to recover all of the baggage we have left at the various stations of our long voyage through the centuries.

Since men are henceforth masters of time and space, they see an infinite field of achievement and progress opening before them. However, burdened by the illogical and contradictory conditions of their surroundings, they are hardly in a position to proceed knowledgeably with the harmonious work of improvement for all. This is understandable. All initiative comes from individuals and insignificant minorities, and these isolated persons or small groups attend to the most urgent needs first, directly attacking whatever evil they find before them. So if their efforts have the advantage of emerging simultaneously on almost all fronts, by the same token, they lack coherent strategy. But theoretically, when one detaches oneself intellectually from the chaos of conflicting interests, it is easy to see immediately that the true and fundamental conquest, from which all others can logically be derived, is that of procuring bread for all men—for all who call themselves "brothers," even though they are very far from being so. When all have enough to eat, all will feel that they are equal. Now this is precisely the ideal that many a small tribe far from our great pathways of civilization already knew how to realize, and we must come to terms with this ideal of solidarity as soon as possible if all of our hopes for progress are not to become the most cruel of ironies. Montaigne has described the opinion on this subject held by the Brazilian natives who were brought to Rouen in 1557 "at the time that the late King Charles the Ninth was there."[24] They were struck by many strange things and above all by the fact "that there were among us men full and crammed with all sorts of good things, [for] which their halves [fellow countrymen] were begging at their doors, emaciated with hunger and poverty; and they thought it strange that these necessitous halves were able to suffer such an injustice, and that they did not take the other by the throat or set fire to their houses."[25] For his part, Montaigne greatly pitied these savages from Brazil for "allowing themselves [to] be deluded with desire of novelty and to leave the serenity of their sky to come and gaze at ours!"[26] They were "unaware … that from this intercourse will be born their ruin."[27] Indeed, these Tupinambá from the American coast have left not a single descendent. All of the tribes were exterminated, and if there still remains a little blood of these indigenous people, it is mixed with that of some despised proletarians.

[24] Michel de Montaigne, *The Essays of Michel de Montaigne* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1934), 1:189.
[25] Ibid., 1:190.
[26] Ibid., 1:189.
[27] Ibid.



Drawing by A Roubille. Words by A. Bruant. Cl. l'Assiette au Beurre.

Toi, tu t'en iras chez Macquart, [You will go to Macquart,]
Moi, j'irai p't'être ben à la Morgue [Me, maybe I'll go to the Morgue]
Ou ben ailleurs, ou ben aut part. [Either elsewhere, or somewhere else.]

The conquest of bread, which true progress requires, must be an actual conquest.[28] It is not simply a question of eating, but of eating the bread that is due by human right rather than owing to the charity of a great lord or wealthy monastery. The unfortunate people who beg at the doors of the barracks and churches number in the hundreds of thousands, perhaps in the millions. Thanks to the vouchers for bread and soup distributed by charity, they barely manage to get by; however, it is very unlikely that the aid provided for all these needy people has had the slightest significance in the history of civilization. The very fact that they have been fed without having asserted their right to food, and perhaps even required to express their gratitude, proves that they consider themselves to be simply the dregs of society. Free men look each other in the eye, and the first condition of their forthright equality is that individuals be absolutely independent of one another, and that they earn their bread through a mutuality of services. Entire populations have been reduced to moral ruin through a gratuitous material existence. When Roman citizens lived in a state of abundance and did not have to work for the food and entertainment provided by the masters of the state, did they not stop defending the empire? A number of classes, among them that of the "deserving poor," prove completely useless in relation to progress as a result of the system of alms, and some cities have fallen into irreversible decay because they contain an idle multitude that, having no need to work for itself, also refuses to work for others. This is the real reason that so many cities and even nations are "dead." Charity brings with it a curse on those it nourishes. This can be witnessed in the Christmas celebrations of the aristocracy, in which young heirs to vast fortunes, draped in luxurious clothes, practice their noble gestures and gracious smiles. And then, under the loving eyes of their mothers and governesses, they nobly distribute presents to the poor of the streets, who are dutifully washed and dressed in their Sunday best for the occasion. Is there a spectacle sadder than that of these young unfortunates, stupefied by the glory of gold in all its munificence?

Down with this ugly Christian charity! The cause of progress is entrusted to the conquerors of bread—in other words, to the working people who are united, free, equal, and released from the bonds of patronage. It will be up to them to finally use scientific method in applying each discovery to the interests of society, and to realize Condorcet's assertion that "Nature has placed no limit on our hopes." For, as another historian and sociologist said, "The more one asks of human nature, the more it gives. Its faculties are stimulated by effort, and its power seems unlimited."[29] As soon as man is firmly confident of the principles according to which he directs his actions, life becomes easy. Fully aware of his due, he accordingly recognizes that of his neighbor. In doing so, he brushes aside the functions usurped by the legislature, the police, and the executioner; thanks to his own ethic, he abolishes law (Emile Acollas). Self-conscious progress is not a normal function of society, a process of growth analogous to that of a plant or animal. It does not open like a flower;[30] instead, it must be understood as a collective act of social will that attains consciousness of the unified interests of humanity and satisfies them

[28] Peter Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread.* [Reclus' note]
[29] H. Taine, *Philosophie de l'art dans les Pays-Bas.* [Reclus' note]
[30] Herbert Spencer, *Social Statics*, 80. [Reclus' note]

successively and methodically. And this will becomes ever stronger as it surrounds itself with new achievements. Once accepted by all, certain ideas become indisputable.

The essence of human progress consists of the discovery of the totality of interests and wills common to all peoples; it is identical to solidarity. First of all, it is necessary to address the economy, which is very different from that of primitive nature, in which the seeds of life pour out with astonishing abundance. At present, society is still very far from achieving the wise use of forces, especially human forces. It is true that violent death is no longer the rule as in former times. Nevertheless, the vast majority of people die before their time. Disease, accidents, injuries, and defects of all kinds, most often complicated by medical treatments applied wrongly or randomly and exacerbated above all by poverty, the lack of essential care, and the absence of hope and cheer, cause decrepitude long before the normal onset of old age. Indeed, an eminent physiologist[31] has written a wonderful book whose principal thesis is that almost all old people die before their time and with an absolute dread of death, which would instead arrive like sleep if it were to come at a time when a man, happy to have led a good life full of activity and love, felt the need for rest.

This uneconomical use of forces is demonstrated above all in great changes, such as violent revolutions and the introduction of new processes. Old equipment, as well as men who are accustomed to a previous form of labor, are discarded as useless; however, the ideal is to know how to utilize everything, to employ refuse, waste, and slag, for everything is useful in the hands of one who knows how to work with the materials. Generally speaking, all modification, no matter how important, is accomplished through a combination of progress and a corresponding regression. A new organism is established at the expense of the old. Even when the vicissitudes of conflict are not followed by destruction and ruin in the strictest sense, they are nevertheless a cause of local decline. The prosperity of some brings the downfall of others, thus confirming the ancient allegory that depicts Fortune as a wheel, lifting up some while crushing others. The same fact can be evaluated in many ways: on the one hand as a great moral advance, and on the other as evidence of decay. From a great, fundamental event such as the abolition of slavery, disastrous consequences can ensue due to the thousand blows and counterblows of life, contrasting with the totality of fortunate results. The slave, and generally speaking even the man whose life has been regulated from infancy and who has never learned to distinguish clearly between two successive and very distinct states of his milieu, easily becomes accustomed to the unchanging routine of existence, as mundane as it may be. He can live without complaining, like a stone, or like a plant hibernating under the snow. As a result of this habituation, during which thought slumbers, it often happens that the man who is suddenly liberated from some form of servitude does not know how to accommodate himself to his new situation. Not having learned how to exercise his will, he stares like an ox at the stick that once goaded him to work. He awaits the bread that had always been thrown to him and that he was accustomed to picking up from the mud. The qualities of slavery, obedience and resignation—as far as one can call them "qualities"—are not the same as those of the free man: initiative, courage, and indomitable perseverance. The person who retains even vaguely the first qualities, who allows himself to miss his former life ruled by the carrot and the stick, will never be the proud hero of his destiny.

On the other hand, the man who has cheerfully accommodated himself to the conditions of a new life of perfect independence, a life that gives to the agent full responsibility for his conduct,

[31] Elie Metchnikoff. [Reclus' note]

is in danger of unimaginable suffering when he finds himself caught again in a vestige of ancient slavery—the military, for example. His life then becomes unbearable, and suicide seems like a refuge. Thus in our incoherent society, in which two opposing principles struggle against one another, it is possible to desire death either because it is too difficult to conquer life or because liberty has so many joys that one cannot give them up. Is it not contradictory that the reaction to a greater intensity in life can be an extraordinary increase in bouts of despair and an obsessive fear of death? The number of suicides has continually increased for several decades in contemporary society and in all so-called civilized countries. Not long ago, this type of death was rare in all lands and completely unknown among certain peoples such as the Greeks, for whom, moreover, poverty, temperance, and harsh work were the rule. But the great whirlwind generated by the cities has produced a corresponding torrent of passions, emotions, changing impressions, ambitions, and insanity in our modern "Babylons." Since life is more active and passionate, it is frequently complicated with crises and often ends abruptly through voluntary death.

MALAYSIAN HARVESTING PALM WINE
(See page 538.)

This is the very sorrowful aspect of our much-acclaimed half-civilization (it is only half-civilized because it is far from benefiting everyone). The average man of our time is not only more active and lively but also happier than in previous times when humanity, divided into innumerable tribes, had not yet become conscious of itself as a whole; however, it is no less true that the moral discrepancy between the way of life of the privileged and that of the outcasts has increased. The unfortunate have become more unfortunate, and envy and hatred are added to their poverty, increasing their physical suffering and forced deprivation. In primitive clans, the victims of starvation and sickness are subject only to physical pain. But among our civilized people, they must also bear the burden of humiliation and even public loathing. Their living conditions and clothing make them seem sordid and repugnant to the observer. Are there not neighborhoods in every large city that are carefully avoided by travelers because of an aversion to the nauseating odors that emanate from them? Except for the Eskimos in their winter igloo, no savage tribe inhabits such hovels as exist in Glasgow, Dundee, Rouen, Lille, and so many other industrial cities, where in cellars with slimy walls, beings that resemble humans drag themselves about painfully for a time in a semblance of life. The barbaric Hindus who live in the forests at the center of the subcontinent, clothed in a few colorful rags, offer a relatively cheerful sight compared to these emaciated proletarians of luxurious Europe, somber, sad, and gloomy in their tattered, filthy clothes. For the observer who is not afraid to go near the factories when they let out, the most striking thing, aside from the clothing of poverty, is the absolute absence of personality. All these beings rushing toward an inadequate meal have had since youth the same withered face and the same vacant, deadened stare. It is impossible to distinguish among them any more clearly than among sheep in a flock. They are not humans, but rather arms, or "hands," as they are so appropriately called in the English language.

This horrible discrepancy, this most dreadful scourge of contemporary society, could be corrected rapidly by scientific method through the redistribution of the goods of the earth, since the resources necessary for all humans are in superabundance. This goes without saying. Humanity is admirably equipped through its progress in the knowledge of time and space, of the innermost nature of things, and of man himself. But is it currently advanced enough to tackle the fundamental problem of its existence, which is the problem of the realization of its collective ideal, not only for the "ruling classes," one caste, or a group of castes, but for all whom a religion once described as "brothers created in the image of God"? Of course, humanity can reach this goal. There will no longer be a question of hunger the day that people who are starving join together to claim their due.

Similarly, the question of education will be resolved, since the problem is acknowledged in principle and because the desire for knowledge is widespread, even if it is only in the form of curiosity. Now one advancement never comes alone; it has a complementary and reciprocal relationship with other advancements in the entirety of social evolution. As soon as the sense of justice is satisfied through the participation of all in the material and intellectual resources of humanity, each man will as a result experience a great unburdening of his conscience. For the present cruel state of inequality, in which some are overloaded with superfluous wealth while others are deprived even of hope, weighs like a bad conscience on the human soul, whether one is aware of it or not. It weighs most on the souls of the fortunate, whose joys are always poisoned by it. The greatest step toward peace would be for no one to do wrong to his neighbor, for it is in our nature to hate those whom we have wronged and to love those whose presence recalls

our own worth. The moral consequences of the very simple act of justice in which bread and education are guaranteed to all would be incalculable.

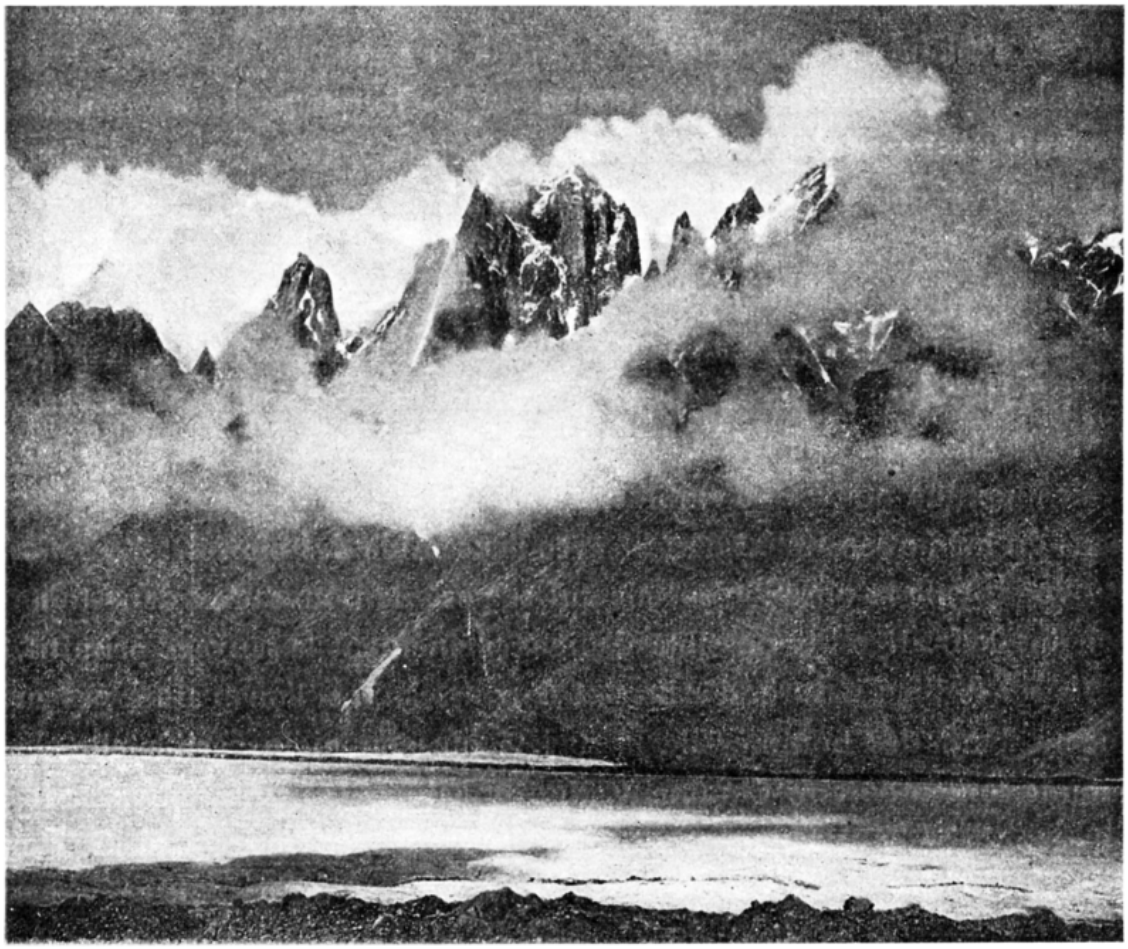
If, continuing the present direction of historical evolution, humanity soon reaches the goals of abolishing death from hunger and stagnation from ignorance, then another ideal will appear like a shining beacon—an ideal that moreover is already being pursued by an ever-growing number of individuals. This is the lofty ambition to regain all lost energies, to prevent the loss of present forces and materials, and also to recover from the past everything that our ancestors allowed to slip away. Generally speaking, this would mean that civilizations would imitate the engineers of our day who are discovering treasures in the debris that was considered worthless by the Athenian miners of the past. If it is true that in certain respects some primitives and ancients surpassed the average modernday man in strength, agility, health, and beauty, then we must become their equals! Granted, this reconquest will not go so far as the recovery of the use of atrophied organs whose former purposes have been discovered by biologists (such as Elie Metchnikoff); however, it is important to know how to maintain fully those energies that are still accorded to us and to retain the use of muscles that, while continuing to function, have become less flexible and are in danger of soon becoming worthless to our bodies. Is it possible to prevent this physical diminishment of man, who is thrown out of balance by the development of his mental capacities? It is predicted that man will gradually turn into an enormous brain, wrapped in bandages to protect him from colds, and that the rest of his body will atrophy. Is there anything we can do to resist this tendency? Zoologists tell us that man used to be a climbing animal, like the monkey. Why, then, does modern man let himself forfeit this skill of climbing, which certain primitives still possess to a remarkable degree, notably those who climb to the tops of palm trees to gather bunches of fruit? As mothers never fail to observe admiringly, infants have astonishing grasping power, with which they can suspend their bodies, even for minutes at a time,[32] yet they gradually lose this initial strength because great care is taken to deny them the opportunity to exercise it. The threat of clothing being ripped and torn through the child's efforts to climb are enough for the parents of our economically-minded society to forbid their offspring to climb trees. The fear of danger is only a secondary consideration in this prohibition.

As a result of such fears, most "civilized" children remain greatly inferior to the sons of savages in games of strength and agility. Furthermore, since they have had little opportunity to exercise their senses outdoors, they do not have the same clarity of vision or keenness of hearing. Compared to the animals of beautiful form and sharpened senses that Herbert Spencer thought they should be, they seem for the most part to have clearly degenerated. In no way do they merit the words of admiration evoked in European travelers by the sight of the young men of Tenimber, practicing stringing their bows or throwing the javelin.[33] The players of pelote, golf, and lacrosse constitute the elite of civilized people for physical beauty. But the spectators would have difficulty finding perfectly balanced forms to rhapsodize over, even among the champions. The evidence is clear. It is certain that in purity of line, dignity of bearing, and gracefulness of movement, a number of Negro, American Indian, Malayan, and Polynesian tribes surpass randomly selected groups representing the average type of the nations of Europe, though perhaps not certain exceptional cases among Europeans. Thus, from this perspective there has been a general regression because of our confinement to our homes and our absurd clothing, which interferes

[32] Drummond, *Ascent of Man*, 101, 103. [Reclus' note]

[33] Anna Forbes, *Insulinde: Experiences of a Naturalist's Wife in the Eastern Archipelago.* [Reclus' note]

with perspiration, the effect of air and light on the skin, and the free development of muscles, which are often constricted, tortured, or even crippled by laced boots and corsets. Nevertheless, numerous examples prove that this regression is not final and irrevocable, since our young people who have been raised in good hygienic conditions and who engage in physical exercise develop in shape and strength like the most beautiful of savages. Besides, they have been granted the superiority of self-awareness and the distinction of intellect. Thanks to the achievements of the past, which moderns acquire rapidly and methodically through education, they succeed in living longer than the savage since they know how to compress into their lives a thousand prior existences and to recall survivals from the past in order to make a logical and beautiful whole out of current practices and the innovations of previous times. If only we could gauge the degree of strength that the modern can attain by using as an example today's skilled mountain climbers of the Alps, the Caucasus, the Rocky Mountains, the Andes, the Tien Shan, and the Himalayas! Certainly, a Jacques Balmat would not have climbed Mont Blanc if a de Saussure had not existed to train him in this undertaking. Today, such experts as Whymper, Freshfield, and Conway are in strength, endurance, knowledge, and the practice of mountain climbing the equals and even the superiors of the most dependable mountain guides, who were trained from youth in all the physical and moral qualities necessary for dangerous ascents. It is the man of science who is now followed by the native to the summit of Kilimanjaro or of the Aconcagua, and it is he who leads the Eskimos to the conquest of the North Pole. Thus it is possible for modern man to realize perfectly his imagined ideal, that of being able to acquire new qualities without losing, or even while regaining, those possessed by his ancestors. This is not at all a chimera.



Cl. Appalachia.
THE WALALHALLA OF BIAFO
Needles around 7,000 meters above sea level.
This part of the Karakorum, North Kachmire, was visited in 1899 by Mr. and Mrs. Workman accompanied by Zurbringen.

This strength of understanding, this increased capacity of modern man, permits him to reconquer the past from the savage in his natural, ancient environment, and then to unite it and blend it harmoniously with his own more refined ideas. But all of this increase in strength will result in a permanent, well-established reconquest only on the condition that the new man include all other men, his brothers, in the same feeling of unity with all things.

Here, then, is the social question that is posed anew in its full scope. It is impossible to love wholeheartedly the primitive savage in his natural environment of forests and streams if at the same time one does not love the men living in the more or less artificial society of the contemporary world. How can we admire and love the small, charming individuality of the flower, or feel brother to the animals and approach them as St. Francis of Assisi did if we do not also see our fellow men as beloved companions? The alternative is to avoid them in the name of love so as to escape the moral wounds inflicted by the hateful, the hypocrites, or the indifferent. The complete union of the civilized with the savage and with nature can take place only through the destruction of the boundaries between castes, as well as between peoples. Each individual must be able to address any of his peers in complete brotherhood, and to speak freely with them "about all that is human," as Terence said, without succumbing to the customs and conventions of the past. Life, restored to its original simplicity, thus entails a complete and amicable freedom of human social intercourse.

Has humanity made any real progress along this road? It would be absurd to deny it. What is called the "tide of democracy" is nothing other than the growing feeling of equality among the members of different castes that were recently enemies. Under a thousand changing surface appearances, the work is carried out in the depths, in all nations, thanks to man's growing knowledge of himself and of others. Increasingly he succeeds in finding the common basis for our likeness to one another and manages to extricate himself from the entanglement of superficial opinions that have kept us separated. We march, then, toward future conciliation, toward a form of happiness far more ample than that which satisfied our ancestors, the animals and the primitives. Our physical and moral world has grown larger at the same time that our conception of happiness has become broader. Indeed, in the future, happiness will be considered as such only if it is shared by all, if it is made conscious and is well thought out, and if it includes within itself the fascinating pursuits of science and the joys of antique beauty.

All of this removes us noticeably from the theory of the "Superman" as understood by the aristocrats of thought. The kings and the powerful readily imagine that there are two systems of morals—theirs, which consists of capriciousness; and obedience, which is suitable for the masses. Similarly, arrogant young people who worship the intellectual powers they think they possess, indulgently place themselves on a high terrace of the ivory tower, beyond the reach of humble mortals. They condescend to chat only with a select few. Perhaps they even believe themselves to be alone. Genius weighs heavily upon them. Underneath their inevitably furrowed brows, a turbulent world rages. They are oblivious to the teeming, formless mass of the unknown multitude far beneath the flight of their thought. It is true that man can discover no limits that he cannot surpass through his striving to study and learn. Yes, he must try to realize his own ideal, to seek to surpass it, and to climb ever higher. Even as a dying man, I believe in my personal progress; those who feel as if they are moribund might as well die. But in order to surpass his limits, man does not need to break the bonds that connect him with the beings around him, for he cannot escape the close solidarity that supports his life through the lives of his fellow creatures. To the contrary, each of his personal advancements means progress for those around him:

he shares his knowledge as he shares his bread, and he does not leave behind the poor and the crippled. He has had teachers—since he was hardly born without a father like some god in a fable—and he will in turn teach those who come after him.

The barbarous methods of the Spartans are still favored by those ineffectual persons who know neither how to heal nor how to teach. They smother those who seem weak and throw the malformed into a hole, breaking their bones. Such are the summary practices of the ineffectual and the ignorant. And what doctor, midwife, or infallible arbitrator will tell us which newborn can be spared and which is beyond hope? Often, the science practiced by these judges has been faulty. A particular body that they had deemed ill-suited for life actually turned out to be admirably adapted to it. A particular intelligence that from the heights of their judicial bench they had classified as moronic developed brilliant and creative powers. Being old, slaves to routine, and misoneistes,[34] they were completely wrong, and it is through revolution against them that the world was ennobled and renewed. The best approach is to accept all men as equals in potential and in dignity, to help the weak by supporting them with one's own strength, to help restore health to the sick, and to open the minds of the unintelligent to elevated thoughts, all with constant concern for the betterment of others and of oneself. For we are part of a whole, and evolution takes place throughout the world, whether it moves from progress to progress or from regression to regression.

Thus happiness, as we understand it, does not consist simply of personal enjoyment. Of course it is individual in the sense that "each is the artisan of his own happiness," but it is true, deep, and complete only when it extends to the whole of humanity. It is not possible to avoid sorrow, accidents, sickness, or even death; however, by joining together with others in an undertaking whose significance he grasps, and by following a method that he knows to be effective, man can be certain of directing the whole great human body toward the greatest good. In comparison to this body, each individual cell is infinitely small, a millionth of a millionth, counting the present population of the earth and all previous generations. Happiness does not mean the attainment of a certain level of personal or collective existence. It is rather the consciousness of marching toward a well-defined goal to which one aspires and that one creates in part through one's own will. To develop the continents, the seas, and the atmosphere that surrounds us; to "cultivate our garden" on earth; to re arrange and regulate the environment in order to promote each individual plant, animal, and human life; to become fully conscious of our human solidarity, forming one body with the planet itself; and to take a sweeping view of our origins, our present, our immediate goal, and our distant ideal—this is what progress means.

Thus we can with complete confidence respond to the question that arises in the depths of each man's being: yes, we have progressed since the time when our ancestors left their maternal caves, during the several thousand years that make up the brief self-conscious period of human life.

[34] "Misoneistes" are defined as "haters of innovation and change."

Elisée Reclus
Progress
1905

Anarchy, Geography, Modernity: Selected Writings of Elisée Reclus.
"Progress" is the final chapter of Reclus' final work, *L'Homme et la Terre.* It is one of the most comprehensive statements of his view of human nature, historical development, and social values. This text is translated in its entirety from volume 6 of *L'Homme et la Terre* (Paris: Librairie Universelle, 1905–8), 501–41. [Images from the French original version (gallica.bnf.fr)have been added here for Anarchist Library]