

The Progress of Mankind

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I.

THE most serious of all questions which present themselves to our mind is the improvement of the human race. Comparing ourselves with primitive peoples and with those still existing savage races which have succeeded in keeping apart from the “civilizers”—too often destroyers—what sure advances have we made, what undeniable recoils must we admit, in this long succession of centuries? Is it possible to measure with any accuracy the gains and losses of humanity during its long history?

We ought, first of all, to recognise that some great minds absolutely deny progress, and reject all idea of a continuous evolution for the better. So great an historian as Ranke sees in history nothing but “a succession of periods, each having its peculiar character, and manifesting diverse tendencies which give a special, unexpected, and even piquant life to the different pictures of each age and of each people.”¹ According to this conception the world would be a sort of museum. If there were progress, said the pietistic writer, then, assured in the course of successive ages of an amelioration in his lot, man would not be in “direct dependence on the Deity,” who regards with impartial eye all the generations that follow each other in time as if they were exactly of equal value.

On the other hand, fixed institutions—monarchies, aristocracies, all official and formalated religions, established, and as it were walled up by men who claim to have realised perfection itself—presuppose that every revolution, every change, will be a fall, a return towards barbarism. The fathers and the grandfathers, panegyrists of bygone times, contribute, with gods and kings, to disparage the present as compared with former times, and to foresee in new ideas a fatal tendency to retrogression. Children incline naturally to consider their parents as superior beings, as those parents themselves did their fathers; and the result of all these sentiments settling in men’s minds, as alluvial deposits on the banks of a river, is to make a veritable dogma of the irremediable fall of man. In our days is it not still the general custom to discourse in prose and in verse upon the “corruption of the age”? By an absolute but almost unconscious want of logic, even those who vaunt the irresistible progress of humanity, readily speak of a *fin de siècle* decadence. Two contrary currents cross each other in their thoughts.

The fact is that the old conceptions clash with the new. The weakening of religions, caused by the pressure of theories which explain the formation of the world by a slow evolution, a gradual emergence of things out of the primitive chaos, rather than by a sudden creation—what is this phenomenon but progress itself, whether we admit it implicitly as Aristotle admitted it, or recognise it in exact and eloquent language, as did Lucretius?²

However, it is very necessary to have a clear understanding as to the meaning of the word “progress,” for with regard to this there might be unfortunate misconceptions. Thousands are the definitions that the Buddhists and the interpreters of Buddhism give of *Nirvana*. In like manner, philosophers, according to the ideal they place before themselves, treat as forward movements evolutions the most diverse and even contradictory. There are some for whom repose is the sovereign good, and who wish, if not for death, at least for perfect tranquillity of body and mind. Progress, as these men understand it, is certainly quite other than it is for valiant souls who prefer a perilous liberty to a tranquil servitude. For the one as for the other the conception of happiness

¹ “Weltgeschichte,” Neunter Theil, ii, pp. 4,5,6, &c.

² Marc Guyau, “La Morale d’Epictète.” p. 157.

takes precedence of all other conceptions in the ideal dreamed of; but whether progress brings happiness or not, it ought above all to be understood as a complete development of the individual, comprehending the improvement of the physical being in strength, beauty, grace, longevity, material enrichment, and increase of knowledge—in fine, the perfecting of character, the becoming more noble, more generous, and more devoted. So considered, the progress of the individual is identified with that of society, united more and more intimately in a powerful solidarity.

If this, then, is progress, and surely it is not possible to conceive it otherwise, more than one will say that humanity does not progress at all—that it only changes its position, gaining on one side, losing on the other—or even that it really grows worse, and that its material enrichment corresponds to an internal process of degeneracy and gangrene. Many pessimistic philosophers have insisted on this. Many explorers, charmed by the simple life of the savage peoples they have visited, considered them very superior to us, and one knows how strongly these narratives impressed the writers of the last century, Rousseau and Diderot amongst the rest. “Let us return to Nature,” was the universal cry, and—strange spectacle—the men of the French Revolution, furiously driven as they were by the whirlwind of passion and the struggles of the time, seem to have been tormented in their mode of thinking and in their language by the constant ideas, of a return both to the period of the ancient republics, Rome and Sparta, and the pure and happy ages of the primitive tribes.

In our days an analogous movement makes itself felt, and even in a more serious way by modern society. Expanded to embrace all mankind, its equilibrium has become much more unstable, and consequently the critics of the actual state of things seek so much the more eagerly in the past for arguments. On the other hand, anthropological researches have been pushed much further, and many travellers of the first rank have brought into the debate the decisive weight of their testimony. It is no longer a question merely of simple, artless narratives, like those of a Jean de Léry, a Claude d’Abbeville, or a Yves d’Evreux on the Topinamboux and other Brazilian savages—narratives otherwise possessing a very real value. The too rapid generalisations of a Cook or of a Bougainville appear similarly insufficient; but their plea is now strengthened by formal and well-considered testimony—as, for example, the memorable passage in the “Malay Archipelago,” published in 1869 by Alfred Russel Wallace.

This page from the illustrious naturalist may be considered as a manifesto, a challenge addressed to those who have accepted without restriction the hypothesis of the indefinite progress of humanity. And this challenge still awaits a reply. It will not be useless to recall its terms, and take them as a controlling text in historical studies:

“What, then, is this ideally perfect 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 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 is right, that all laws and all punishments shall be unnecessary Now, it is very remarkable that among people in a very low stage of civilisation we find some approach to such a perfect social state. I have lived with communities 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 an 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 civilisation; there is none of that widespread division of labour, which, while it increases wealth, produces also conflicting interests; there is not that severe competition and struggle for existence or for wealth, which the dense populations of civilised countries inevitably create Now, although we have progressed vastly beyond the savage stage in intellectual achievements, we have not advanced equally in morals It is not too much to say that the mass of our populations have not at all advanced beyond the savage code of morals, and have in many cases sunk below it.”³

But Wallace would be the first to say that one need not be drawn into paradoxical exaggerations, and certainly one would be wrong in generalising too absolutely from what the great naturalist has said of the savages of Amazonia and Insulinde, and to apply it to all the savage populations of the continents and archipelagoes. The island of Borneo, where Wallace has found so many examples of that moral nobleness which determined his judgment, is also that great land which Bock has described under the title, “The Country of the Cannibals,”⁴ and which might also be designated “The Country of the Headsmen,” with special reference to the Dyaks, who, in order to acquire the right to call themselves men and to found a family, must, by cunning or in open fight, have cut off one or more human heads.

In a similar manner,—that marvellous isle of Tahiti, the new Cytheræa of which the early navigators spoke with naïve enthusiasm, does not merit all the praises bestowed upon it by Europeans, enchanted at once by the beauty of its landscapes and the amiability of its inhabitants. Those majestic and gentle persons, those venerable old men, who seemed to them to complete by their noble gravity the charming pictures of the Oceanic paradise, were not what the newcomers thought. Many of them belonged to the terrible caste of the Arioi, who, though they doubtless once constituted a clergy devoted to celibacy, had become an association of murderers, assassinating their children with infernal rites. It is true that Tahiti had then long passed the first stages of its development, and that its population was not any more to be considered primitive. But what are the tribes that one can consider as still having the authentic character of savages? In the inquiries that learned men have to make in order to compare different states of civilisation, the fixing of the actual point which a people has reached constitutes the capital difficulty.

In fact, the thousands of tribes whom “civilized” men haughtily call “savages” correspond to different periods of existence set out at regular distances on the road of ages and in the infinite network of environments. One tribe is in full course of progressive evolution, another in incontestable decay; the former is in its period of becoming, the latter on the way to decline and death. So that each example in the great inquiry into progress ought to lie accompanied, at least mentally, by the special history of the human group in question, for two points identical in appearance may have a significance absolutely opposed, should the one relate to the infancy of an organism, and the other to its old age.

One primary fact comes out conspicuously from our comparative ethnographical studies. The essential difference between the civilisation of a primitive people, little influenced by its neighbours, and the modern civilisation of intermingled peoples consists in the simple character of

³ “The Malay Archipelago,” Wallace, pp. 595, 596. Third edition.

⁴ “Unter den Kannibalen auf Borneo.”

the one and the complex character of the other. The first, but slightly developed, has, at least, the advantage of being coherent and conformable to its ideal; the second, immense in its range, and infinitely superior in the forces at work, is not only complex and diverse, but also incoherent; it lacks unity, and pursues contrary objects at the same time. In the simple societies of the prehistoric and savage world equilibrium was easily established, and consequently a primitive tribe, or race, very little developed in knowledge, possessing only rudimentary arts, and leading a life without much variety, has often been able, nevertheless, to attain a condition of mutual justice, well-being, and happiness greatly surpassing that of a modern society urged on by a continual movement of renovation. The individuals who compose a clan, a few tens or hundreds of persons, do not see beyond the bounds of their native world, but they perfectly well know how it works in every part, and all the members of the social group are considered by each one as so many fathers or mothers, brothers or sisters. In this little circle the relations which seem equitable, those that opinion encourages, and even imposes, are those which, in fact, prevail; the ideal is at hand, so to speak, and is realised without effort. The ideal of our modern society embraces the worlds, but does not grasp them.

One may imagine the whole series of men as having formed during both historical and prehistoric times a continuous succession of swarms, at first microscopic, then more and more extended, and constantly increasing in complexity, while at the same time their ideal rose, and became more difficult of attainment. One might compare this human evolution to the whole of the evolution of living beings, from cellular aggregations and little distinct colonies, such as the salpas who float like ribbons in the sea.

The characteristic of each of these little solitary societies is to constitute an independent organism, and to be sufficient to itself. None, however, are completely closed to outside influences; encounters, relations, direct and indirect, take place between one group and another, and it is thus that, according to internal changes and outside events, each distinct particle of humanity has interrupted its special individual evolution, from youth to old age and death, by associating itself, voluntarily or by force, to another political body, becoming integrated with it in a superior organisation, and so beginning a new career of life and progress. But the destinies of these little isolated societies differ. Among them a great number perish through senile exhaustion, or by some sanguinary conflict, while the surviving societies, assimilated successively by larger organisms, succeed at last, after a series of ages, in forming those great nations which imagine themselves, and which in reality are to a certain degree, the depositaries of all the conquests of civilisation.

Let us, then, take for example one of these very little social cells—a primitive clan, contrasting with our great modern societies, not only by the dimensions of the space occupied and the number of the individuals which form it, but also by a closer solidarity among the members of the social body, by possession of a more assured personal liberty, a more humane sense of justice, a less perturbed life, by approaching nearer to happiness, if happiness be understood simply to imply the satisfaction of our instincts, our appetites, and our sentiments of affection. Let us select our specimen as remote as possible from the man of today: among the Negritos—those primitive tribes whom many naturalists class as a distinct species from Negroes—the feeble remnant of populations that formerly occupied the tropical regions, at least in south-eastern Asia, in the Insulinde, and in Malaysia.

The Aeta of the Philippines—especially those of the island which bears the racial name, Negroes—have evidently much changed since they entered into frequent relations with the his-

panicised populations and also with the Spaniards who have taken possession of the archipelago. They had completely lost their ancient language by about the middle of the seventeenth century, only preserving a small number of words; they had likewise abandoned a number of their costumes in the vicinity of the yellow and white races; but soon as they have become, and notwithstanding their numerical decline, they continue none the less to differ at every point of view from the surrounding populations. Although so very humble as to bestow on their neighbours a name which testifies great respect, they are incontestably their superiors in goodness, in spirit of justice, in rectitude of intention, and in reverence, in the truth of word and deed. Their life is most simple; as for habitations, they content themselves with boughs twisted together, or with reed mats, protected by frames of palm-leaves, which they turn against the wind or rain, or the too fierce sunshine. But if the individual occupies himself little with his personal well-being, he is absolutely devoted to the common interests. The members of the tribe all regard themselves as brothers, so much so that at birth of an infant the great family comes together as a whole, in order to decide—what is considered a matter of capital importance—the name that the new-comer shall receive. Without interference on the part of the society, or of its representatives, monogamic unions are founded, devoid in one place of religious ceremonies, celebrated in another by rites in which the sweetness of marriage is symbolised by two tufted trees, whose trunks, swaying to and fro, intermingle their foliage. The sick, the old, are attended to with perfect devotion, and the “chief”—an office purely nominal as regards power—is simply the elder whose great age merits the most respect.⁵

Certainly no portion, however insignificant, of our immense modern political societies, with their huge ambitions, could possibly be described in like terms.

The philosopher, De Greef, speaking of this primitive system of equality, finds in it a character rather negative than positive. According to him, all parts of the social body being still nearly identical, as in the inferior organisms, there would not be in these primitive groups sufficient difference of functions to render it possible to compare them with a modern society.⁶ This observation, however, has only a relative value, for the differentiation of functions is already very complex in all bodies composed of men and women, children and old people, residents and travellers, workers in the field, the meadows, the forests, and the sea. In the evolution of the same principles, the march of history is in reality continuous from the animal to man, and it is with perfect justice that we compare little primitive societies and our great modern humanity, when we state that the first have been able to attain their more contracted ideal of a well-balanced and happy life, whilst the human race, taken as a whole, is still very far from the ideal it dreams of. Since the cycle of the earliest societies has been broken, the human mind has worked wonders, but there has been no re-conquest of a normal and harmonious condition.

Having thus referred to the Negritos as a type of a primitive people with a very narrow horizon, let us take for an example a population which approaches our own race in the kind of life it leads, and in being forced into much more complex conditions of labour. The Ounougonn, who are called by the Russians Aleutians, after the islands where they have established themselves, dwell in regions cold enough to compel them to wear clothing and to construct semi-subterranean cabins, chiefly formed of plaited branches covered with a thick layer of hardened dirt; a great

⁵ Semper, “Die Philippinen und ihre Bewohner”; — Ferd. Blumentritt, “Versuch Einer Ethnographie der Philippinen,” *Ergänzungsheft zu Petermann’s Mittheilungen*, No. 67.

⁶ Guillaume de Greef, “Sociologie Générale Élémentaire,” *leçon xi*, p. 39

lens of ice is used as a skylight. The necessities of alimentation have also made the Aleutians into a fishing people, clever at constructing boats covered with skins through which they insert their bodies as into a drum. The terrific seas they traverse have made them dauntless mariners, and some among them, especially the whale-fishers, become well-informed naturalists, uniting in a special corporation which can only be entered after a long period of trial.⁷ The Aleutians, like their neighbours on the mainland, are sculptors of singular ability, and very curious objects have been found in their funereal sanctuaries beneath the vaulted rocks. The complexity of Aleutian life is, moreover, manifested by their code of social propriety, regulated by custom, and most energetically maintained among relations, between allies and with strangers. And notwithstanding this relatively high degree of civilisation, the Aleutians remained up to a recent period, thanks to their isolation, in a state of peace and perfect social equilibrium. The first European navigators who entered into relations with them unanimously praise their qualities and their virtues. The Archbishop Innokenti, better known under the name of Veniaminov, who for ten years observed their life, describes them as “the most affectionate of men,” as “beings of incomparable modesty and discretion, who were never guilty of the least violence of language or action, not a rude word ever coming from their month.” There is no people in the West of Europe which in this respect can compare with the Aleutians.

In coming nearer to the state of the nations of the European type another element presents itself—that of natives of various races, who, proud of the title “civilised,” have become in the course of ages half assimilated to their conquerors. In this case, again, it often happens that the most happy and the best in point of simplicity and purity of life are those who represent the race called inferior. An example of this is found in the amiable populations of the Philippine Islands: the Tagals, Vicolos, and Visayas, who, since the Spanish Conquest, have drawn sufficiently near to the masters of the country to practise devoutly their religious ceremonies and to call themselves “Christians;” who have learnt to read Castilian and employ the Roman letters in writing their own language; who even dress as Europeans, following at a distance the Paris fashions. If their spiral course of civilisation is not quite that of the modern world, they are, at all events, developing according to a parallel curve. These natives are hispanicised, but are by no means Spaniards; their society is almost entirely ignorant of the social problems of Europe, and leads an existence much less complicated, but more happy, than that of the European proletariat. In nearly all the districts of the Archipelago each family has its little bit of field and orchard-land, its neat little house, well-furnished, and surrounded by plants of rich verdure and penetrating perfume. The husbandman is his own master; and not long since large properties were almost unknown. Even commodities destined for exportation are produced by the small proprietor. Pauperism is not yet introduced into the Archipelago, and one may hope that the population will not have, as in countries with great proprietors, to pass a long time in the sad stage of proletarianism. Even at his work the Tagal of the Philippines can give himself up to his passion for music, at Luzon, sowers are to be seen throwing their handfuls of rice in cadence with the rhythm of the violin or the clarionet.⁸ If such peaceful and kind peasants are now thrown into the turmoil of war by the oppression of grasping monks, certainly they are not responsible. The price of blood was on other heads.

⁷ Alphonse Pinart, “Bulletin de la Société de Géographie,” dic. 1873.

⁸ Montano, “Bulletin de la Société de Géographie,” 1881; W. Gifford Palgrave, “Ulysses; or, Scenes and Studies in Many Lands.”

To these examples, chosen from successive stages of civilisation, any one can add others equally significant, found in works specially treating of ethnology, and can verify for himself the fact that instances of superior morality, as well as of a mere optimistic appreciation of life, can be met with in confined societies, barbarous or even savage, and very inferior to ours in their intellectual comprehension of things. In the indefinite spiral which humanity runs without ceasing—evolving by a continuous motion that may vaguely be compared to the earth's rotation—it has often happened that certain parts of the great body are much nearer than others to the ideal centre of the orbit. The law of alternation will one day perhaps be accurately known; it suffices at present to state the facts themselves without drawing from them premature conclusions, and especially without accepting the paradoxes of discouraged sociologists, who only see in the material progress of humanity signs of its real decadence.

II.

It is, then, established by the observation of facts and the study of history that many tribes, so far as the material satisfactions of life go, arrive at a state of perfect solidarity, both by the common enjoyment of the products of the earth, and by an equitable distribution of resources in case of dearth. These groups of savages do not even comprehend that they could do otherwise. This is what Montaigne has noticed with reference to the natives of Brazil who were brought to Rouen in 1557, "at the time the late King Charles IX. was there." One of the strange facts which struck them most was that there were "among us men full and gorged with all sorts of comforts, and that their halves (their fellow-countrymen) were begging at their doors, emaciated with hunger and poverty; and they found it strange that these necessitous halves were able to suffer such an injustice and did not take the others by the throat or set fire to their houses." For his part, Montaigne greatly pitied these natives of Brazil, "for having allowed themselves to be decoyed by novelty, and having quitted their own sweet climes in order to see ours!... Out of this commerce will arise their ruin."⁹ And, in fact, these Topinamboux of the American coast have left no descendants; all the tribes have been exterminated, and if there still remains a little native blood it is in course of mixture with that of the despised proletarians.

This primary law of solidarity and love, which for those who belong to the same tribe consists in assiduously labouring together in the same work and in sharing together to the last morsel the common resources, permeates, so to say, the whole of social morality. Community of work and of life carries with it a sense of distributive justice, perfect mutual respect, a wonderful delicacy of feeling, a refined politeness in words and in acts, a practice of hospitality which goes as far as the complete abnegation of self and the abandonment of personal property. What touching histories trustworthy travellers relate on this subject! Wallace tells us how the Malay worker abstains religiously from troubling the sleep of his companion, and wakes him up only at the last extremity, and in order to avoid any disagreeable shock, with ingenious precautions. Vollmer¹⁰ shows us the King of Samoa rising in the night to play the flute in the neighbourhood of his guests in order to procure them agreeable dreams. Those who have not travelled in savage countries, where hospitality is by tradition a moral law, cannot imagine with what sweet tenderness, what delicate attentions, what indescribable goodness, the women welcome a stranger sick, thirsty, or

⁹ "Essais."

¹⁰ "Südseekönige."

simply wanting rest! Doubtless feminine devotion finds in our civilised lands equal opportunities of exercise, but it only manifests itself to a small number of fortunate people chosen out of the family circle, or among friends, or exceptionally among the sick in a hospital; a select few can enjoy it; whereas in many a tribe of savages, red or black, Indians or Peuls, it is sufficient to be in want of a consolation or of a kind word, to have it given you with unbounded goodness.

The man in a state more nearly approaching nature than the civilised man also possesses another immense advantage. He is more intimately acquainted with the animals and the plants, with the powerful scent of the earth, and the gentle or terrible phenomena of the elements; he has remained in direct communication with the planetary life of which he is the product, and which we only half see, separated from it by the artificial life in which we are shut up. He feels in perfect unity with all that which surrounds him, and of which, in his way, he comprehends the life as if all things moved with a rhythm which he himself obeyed. We are no longer able to understand the invocations which he makes to the spirits of the air and of the forest, and it is with great difficulty that we interpret the dances in which the savages celebrate the stars and the seasons. Symbolism conceived in natural things, very difficult to understand in our days, because we live in a conventional world, is among primitive peoples a sort of spontaneous language. It seems quite natural to the populations of Central India, just as it does to the Cingalese mountaineers, and to the Aeta of the Philippines, to figure the union of man and woman by the union of two trees, the one with strong branches laden with fruits, the other delicate as some slender tropical plant of the bindweed order, laden with odoriferous flowers. Each scene of human life is accompanied with corresponding scenes drawn from the vegetable world. A real friendship is thus born between men and natural things. Thanks to a survival of a far-off past, the Walloon peasants still wish a happy new year to the trees of the field.¹¹ Finding these objects an integral part of their surroundings, without any thought of freeing themselves from them, the primitive races are absolutely resigned to destiny, and surpass civilised men, speaking generally, in the simplicity with which they meet death. That fine end of life which in certain historical personages appears to us so admirable, because it is really exceptional, is the ordinary way of dying among savages; taught by necessity, they conform themselves naturally to things. Death is for them the simple continuation of life; they die in all tranquillity of soul without seeming to think that their exit will make the least void in the universe. However, it must be said that populations, if not primitive, at least savage, offer us, with regard to the act of death, the most opposite examples. Whilst in rudimentary societies which have remained free from theocratic institutions, most individuals die with a sublime simplicity, it is not thus in tribes which submit to the government of magicians or priests, considered as the masters of life and death, and holding in their hands the keys of the tomb. No spectacle is more repugnant than that of the madmen who, by gestures, cries, dances, or hysterical contortions, pretend to tear the sick man from the death which is carrying him off.

Every change which results in doing away with the isolation of the clan or nation, and introducing into it forcibly new wants, brings on a corresponding modification in style of life and in personal morality. Even when two political bodies meet peacefully, when the stronger does not begin by a display of force, despoiling, or even exterminating, the weaker, it none the less produces an internal transformation by which the two groups, influenced the one by the other, integrate themselves slowly in order to arrive at the constitution of a superior individuality. But

¹¹ Eugene Monseur, "Cours d'Histoire Religieuse."

it is with the mingling of men as with that of the waters. Two distinct river-currents flow for a long time side by side in the same bed, whirling in eddies the whole length of the line of friction, and it is only at a great distance from the confluence down the stream that the water presents the same aspect from one bank to the other. In the same manner two different populations, entering perforce into a common political circle, become mutually hostile over the whole surface of contact; they oppose one another, each wishes to remain faithful to its customs, language, and traditions, to its costume, to its whims and caprices. Both readily manifest their worst side. It is curious, in the markets of the Congo villages, to see how differently traffic is carried on among negroes themselves and between them and the whites. In the latter case there is continual haggling, chaffering—the blacks cheat, the whites shout, abuse, and come to blows; whilst the blacks quietly, or in a few friendly words, exchange with each other their commodities, the prices of which are known in advance.

Thus every human group, in becoming attached to another group, whether by the necessity of alliance or by conquest, is bound to recommence its interior evolution: to the *corso* succeeds a *ricorso*,¹² the spiral describes a new circle, on a vaster scale when there is increase of men, of forces, of industry, on a lesser one when struggles, exterminations, servitude, have thrown them back. In the preface to his “Histoire Romaine,” Michelet tells us how Vico, conceiving the world under the symmetrical form of a city, liked to consider the movement of humanity as an everlasting circulation, a continual going and returning. But the French historian adds that if men march in circles, the circles are always increasing in size. This is certainly true with reference to the part of humanity to which we belong. But for how many other political and social groups has it been the contrary? How many times has the wish of Montaigne with regard to the Topinamboux been repeated by us? Placing ourselves in imagination in the position which the civilised peoples have made for the savage races, would it not have been more advantageous for the Hurons never to have met in the forests of the Laurentides the French colonists of Canada? Would it not have been happier for the Red Indians of the United States—the Creeks and Seminoles, the Shoshones and Sioux, the Wolves and Foxes—never to have come into contact with the Yankees? And, in the same way, would it not have been preferable for the Tasmanians and Anstralian, as well as the Matabele and the Mashonas, never to have known the name of their English conquerors? And the people of the Cameroons and the Tanganyika, have they not good right to curse their German so-called civillisers? Every explorer penetrating into a new country unknown to Europeans has had to begin by saying to himself, as he beheld the villages and happy populations, that his very presence was the preliminary announcement of destruction and massacre. One of these great travellers, and not the least illustrious, avowed in my presence that, at the sight of a fine and happy peoplê in Central Africa, he had felt in the depth of his heart how just destiny would have been had the blacks assassinated him to prevent him from relating his travels. But he was spared, and the sad vicissitude of things required this compassionate man to be among the slaughterers.

It is not merely little civilisations belonging to clans or to savage tribes which retrogression has destroyed or deplorably lessened; there are also great nations which have been condemned to decay by the difficulties of a perfect integration in one superior national individuality. The examples of the Babylonians and the Hittites, of the Persians and Egyptians, are there to prove that decay can take place on an enormous scale and so as to strike millions and tens of millions

¹² Giambattista Vico, “La Scienza Nuova.”

of men for thousands of years. A recoil of this kind, which, however, was succeeded by a new oscillation in favour of progress, was brought about in Greece itself, the educator of the whole modern world. The fact is that no union, pacific or forced, of two ethnical groups, can be accomplished without progress being accompanied by at least a partial regress. A change of this nature always involves a displacement of the centre of gravity, and by an inevitable consequence certain seats of action are abandoned and others acquire a sudden importance. An entirely new organism establishes itself at the expense of the old one; the dwelling-places change, industries are modified, and the interests connected with abandoned modes of work suffer severely. Even when the vicissitudes of conflict have not been followed by destruction properly so called, they are not the less the cause of local decay, and the prosperity of some leads to the decline of others, since the different elements of the society constituting itself anew are in a state of struggle, and the common solidarity is not yet formed. In such conditions direct progress cannot be made; oblique, tortuous, it oscillates in an uncertain manner, following the parallelogram of the forces which urge it forward.

The word "civilisation" is one of those vague terms of which the different senses are confused. For most people it means refinement of manners, especially external habits of politeness, though undoubtedly men of stiff bearing and abrupt behaviour may have a moral value very superior to that of the courtier who can frame an elegant compliment. Others see in civilisation only the sum of all the material improvements due to science and modern industry. Railways, telescopes, telegraphs, telephones, and other inventions, appear to them sufficient proof of the collective progress of society, and they do not seek to know more by sounding the depths of the immense organism. But those who study the ocean of humanity, even to its abysses, say that each civilised nation is composed of classes placed one over another, representing in each age all the series of the anterior ages, with their corresponding intellectual and moral culture. The society of to-day contains all the previous societies in the state of survival; and the immediate contrast of extreme conditions renders their divergence striking. Even if the average man be now more prosperous and more happy than he formerly was when humanity, divided into innumerable tribes, was not yet conscious of itself as a whole, it is none the less true that the difference in style of life between the privileged and disinherited classes is greatly increased, and renders the unfortunate man more unfortunate; adding to his poverty envy and hatred, and aggravating the physical sufferings and his compulsory abstinence. In a primitive tribe the starving and the sick have only their bodily pain to bear; among our civilised peoples they have also to sustain the weight of humiliation, and even of public loathing, being nearly always inexorably fated to conditions of lodging and clothing which render them in appearance sordid and repulsive. Are there not districts in every great city which travellers carefully avoid for fear of their pestilential odours? No savage tribe inhabits such lairs. Glasgow, Dundee, and all other industrial cities have quarters containing groups of filthy habitations, to which it would be difficult to find a parallel in the homes of the primitive peoples. The barbarous Hindoos, who live in the centre of the peninsula clad in a few coloured tatters, offer a spectacle relatively gay in comparison with the proletarians of luxurious England, who look so sombre and lugubrious in their ragged and dirty garments.

That a nation is merely found much more advanced than another in science, art and industry does not prove that it is in a more rapid state of progress; it may even have entered upon a period of decline, while the less advanced population may be moving with spirit on the upward way. During the period of arrest or even of recoil, caused by conquest and loss of liberty, or when the struggle for existence does not leave respite for thought or the quest of new life, man is not

in a really historic stage; his customary life is only distinguished from that of other animals by a difference in proportion, "it belongs to human zoology, to natural history, not the history of man."¹³ Besides this, progress may be achieved in a nation or in several nations, although a part, or a majority of the individuals, are left outside the movement. No doubt every cause ought to produce its effect in one place after another, penetrating at last by various ways into every little human valley; but how slow, how imperceptible at times is this propagation of movement. At the bottom of the sea, do the animalculæ, who live in the slime, feel the agitation of the tempests which higher up are wrecking fleets? Does the man who in the social depths is without bread to eat or books to read, care about the discovery of a new cereal, or about some powerful drama which agitates the intellectual world? On the other hand, how can the rich man who troubles himself about nothing, who is fed, dressed, carried, who is furnished with everything he needs, even including the semblance of ideas and ready-made phrases, participate in progress? Left to himself he would soon fall into impotence and become the prey of death. In the social hierarchy, he is deemed the representative of progress *par excellence*, because all the products of luxury surround him, and all the ambitious gravitate towards his person; but he is, on the contrary, a phenomenon of decadence, since he consumes without producing, and adds absolutely nothing to the common civilisation.

III.

Thus every change in history compels those who study it to a double process, analogous to commercial book-keeping. They ought to enter on the debit side all the losses that have been suffered, on the credit side all the profits realised. The proof that this social book-keeping is a very difficult matter is that the discussion as to the reality of progress taken as a whole still continues, that the question is asked whether the gains made in a general way are not covered by losses in happiness and in intimacy with nature. But these very doubts ought to encourage the inquirer to get exactly at the proportion of gains and losses.

The last are known, thanks to the study of the small communities which have reached for a certain time a rhythmic state of social life. We know that in many tribes not opened to civilisation justice is practised with real religiousness, that the spirit of solidarity unites as in a single being all the members of the social body, and that no trace of pessimism comes to trouble it in the experience of life; finally, in those societies the relations of man with nature are much more intimate, and the poetry of existence is felt in a more spontaneous manner.

And what are the conquests of our modern world in the way of progress? They are immense. In the first place, humanity has arrived at self-consciousness. No nation, whatever it may wish, or however it may protest, has its horizon limited by its own frontiers. The complete exploration of the earth and of the seas to their boundaries of ice, the perpetual movement of travellers passing from one world to another, the presence everywhere of sailors, of colonists and of tourists, have truly made man the citizen of the planet; and patriotic as he may be, or is supposed to be, it is impossible for any one not to look beyond his native soil to the neighbouring or distant countries in which events are taking place most important to the whole destiny of mankind.

¹³ P. Lavroff, "l'Idée du Progrès dans l'Anthropologie," p. 17. "Bulletin de la Société d'Anthropologie de Paris." Séances de 1er Fév. et 18 Avril 1872.

During this half-century universal attention was directed for four or five years to the plains of the New World, where the question of slavery was definitely decided. Then all eyes turned towards the East, where, on the traces of the ancient canal from the Nile to the Red Sea, the great commercial way was opened 'which brought India and Europe some thousands of miles nearer, and thus suddenly changed the equilibrium of the world. And did not the centre of the human drama recently move to the extremity of Asia, where an old nation, altogether outside the circle of Aryan development, has nevertheless shown itself, in science and the conduct of war, the equal, if not the superior, of its competitors in the European west?

Terrestrial explorations, geographical discoveries, tend more and more to be completed everywhere by an exact topography, so that man can now look down upon the earth as if he were elevated above it on an aeroplane, and note the errors his predecessors committed owing to their living in too confined a sphere. In the whole course of history the centres of civilisation have always moved along certain curves, and these local orbits pursued for some centuries—a mere minute in the life of humanity—have been considered too hastily as the expression of a definite law. Thus in our own world of Western Europe historians, struck by the elegant parabola described by the march of civilisation from ancient Babylon to our modern cities, formulated a law according to which the centre of human thought moved from east to west, following the course of the sun.

Before the epoch of Hellenic efflorescence the Egyptians, embracing in their mind the immense Nilotic world, a universe in itself, gave another direction to the propagation of thought; they believed that it had come to them, as the fruitful alluvial deposits came, from south to north. They were mistaken, since civilisation propagated itself in a contrary direction, from Memphis to Thebes of the "hundred gates." In other countries it is clearly along rivers, following the course of the stream from the source to the mouth, that the movement of culture has given birth to populous cities, the centres of human labour. In India the trajectory was from the north-west to the south-east along the banks of the Ganges and of the Djumna; and in the vast Chinese plains the "line of life" is distinctly directed from west to east into the valleys of the Hoang-ho and the Yang-tse-kiang.

These examples are sufficient to show that the so-called law of progress, displacing the principal scene of the world in the same direction as the course of the sun, has only a temporary and local value, and that other laws have prevailed in divers countries according to the lie of the land, the attractive forces arising from the configuration of the continents, and the advantages of soil and climate. And now, thanks to the general spread of inventions and of human knowledge, these lines imagined by our predecessors on the circumference of the globe are, so to speak, submerged beneath an inundating flood which covers all parts of the earth; it is, from another point of view, that deluge of knowledge, of which the Gospel speaks, which should spread over the whole world. The element of space has lost its importance, for man is able and willing to inform himself concerning all the phenomena of soil, climate, history, and society which distinguish the different countries. Now, to comprehend each other is already, in a certain degree, to mingle together. The contrast between land and land, nation and nation, continues everywhere to exist; but it grows less, and tends gradually to be neutralised in the comprehension of educated people.

While geography conquered space, and thus made it possible for mankind to become conscious of itself from one end of the world to the other, the historian, turning towards the past, conquered time. The human race, which is unifying itself from one end of the world to the other, is equally attempting to realise itself under a form which embraces all the ages. This is a second conquest

not less important than the first. All anterior civilisations, even the prehistoric, are henceforth more or less known to us, and consequently can, in a certain sense, be incorporated into the life of modern societies. By the succession of periods, which we can now study as a synoptical table unfolding itself according to the perfect logic of events, we cease to live merely in the flying moment; we embrace the past in the ages retraced by the annalists. In this way we detach ourselves from the strict line of development indicated by our environment and our race, and we see unrolled before us all the paths, parallel or divergent, that other fractions of humanity have followed. The ways are open to us, and we feel obliged to enter them, for any example given by other men, our brothers, must appeal to our genius of imitation. As our horizon is enlarged, in time as well as in space, a greater number of models for study crowd round us, and among them there is much to awaken in us the desire to resemble them in one part or another of their ideal. In moving about, and in modifying ourselves, we have lost a certain part of our acquisitions, and now we may ask ourselves whether it is not possible to recover all the baggage abandoned at the different stages of our long Odyssey through time.

A third conquest of civilisation is the most obvious, and the ordinary panegyrist of the present day are therefore eager to insist upon it—the prodigious development of modern industry, due to the discoveries of men of learning and to the practical genius of the innumerable Prometheuses, bearers of the sacred fire, who spring from the school and the factory. On the other hand, the over-cultured, the poets, declaring themselves in love with antique simplicity, affect to despise all this utilitarian progress of society, though they deign to make use of it to their own advantage; and if they seek mediæval objects for the ornamentation of their dwellings, they appreciate on every important occasion in life rapid locomotion and the almost instantaneous transmission of voice and thought. Whatever disdain the pessimist may bestow upon this prodigious growth of human forces, the sincere man is struck with admiration at these machines, which have more than doubled the power of human work, and given to our life so great intensity of action. The active worker can henceforth condense into his short life of sixty to eighty years, more work than one of his ancestors, reduced to his own force alone, could have accomplished in a thousand years.

The progress man has realised in the material world he has equally accomplished in the intellectual. He has gone into the analysis of things much more deeply, and does not allow himself to be deceived by superficial appearances; he studies bodies in the intimate grouping of their cells, and he recognises profound analogies between objects of dissimilar aspect. Strong in his power of penetrating the infinitely little, man can turn again to the infinitely great, and resume the synthesis in its most audacious form, comparing the formation of a grain of sand with that of the whole solar System, and of the universe in its immensity. This same power of decomposition and reconstruction which the modern man applies to nature he equally applies to his like, and the old adage, “Know thyself,” has never been so near to realisation; for one can only know oneself by comparison with another, and in these days the dissection of the human being from an intellectual and moral point of view is pursued in a systematic manner with astonishing acuteness of discernment. Psychology has become an exact science, and character novels, a style formerly unknown, have taken a rank of very high order in contemporary literature. Man, in learning more narrowly to scrutinise himself, even in parts of his nature until recently beyond his consciousness, discovers for each of the acquisitions and revelations of his own being corresponding wants; his ideal grows indefinitely in proportion to the improvement of his mind and the sensibility of his heart. This is one of those advances which many persons have been

tempted to curse, since in many cases it may excite unrealisable desires, causing a sadness which can never be consoled. But what truly noble soul does not prefer the melancholy of an unrealised ideal to the vulgarity of a commonplace life, without the desire or the will for something better?

Thus admirably furnished with tools by its progress in the knowledge of space and of time, of the intimate nature of things and of man himself, is mankind at the present time prepared to approach the capital problem of its existence, the realisation of a collective ideal? Certainly. The work, if not of assimilation, at least of appropriation of the earth is nearly terminated, to the profit of the nations called civilised, who have become by this very fact the nurses and educators of the world; there are no longer any barbarians to conquer and, consequently, the directing classes will soon be without the resource of employing abroad their surplus national energy. The internal problems, which at the same time will be those of the whole world, will therefore force themselves irresistibly to the front.

The first of all these problems, no one can doubt, is that of bread for all. The statistics of the present production no longer permit us to doubt that the resources of the earth are amply sufficient fully to nourish all the inhabitants of this planet, and besides, if they were not enough, why should not the labour of the unemployed crowding round the gates of the factories be utilised for the increase of the general wealth of humanity? By singular irony of things—showing the complete opposition between a moral life and the ruling theories of economy—the greater part of the land-owners complain of “over-production” and find their harvest too good, while the consumers declare that the products are insufficient, since numbers of them remain too poverty-stricken to buy bread enough to live. We have not here to enter into the discussion of the means to be employed in order that all the famished may receive the food which is their due; it is enough that society be what it pretends to be—a “society of brothers,” in order to render possible the realisation of its first duty—give bread to all.

Man, moreover, does not live by bread alone. He ought equally to learn how to develop, not only his muscles, but all the intellectual and moral forces of his being. In many countries this has already been recognised, all children receiving a certain instruction described as “primary”; but what a distance still exists between the affirmation of the principle and its true realisation! What profitable education do children receive who are miserably shut up in one of the daily prisons under the eye and ferule of those whom excess of labour, insufficiency of pay, and want of liberty, render perforce sullen and traitors to the noble cause they represent? As to those children who profit in some measure from the instruction given them, whatever it be, how is their time of study wasted, how mischievous it becomes when they are taken away from useful work and put to absurd recitations. How can they fail to be irritated by such trumpery teaching, which, far from preparing them for social peace, leads them to revenge?

Let the double ideal—bread for the body and bread for the mind—be assured to all, and how many other desirable things would thereby be on the road to accomplishment. One form of progress never comes alone; it presents itself again in other forms of progress throughout the social evolution. The sense of justice being satisfied by the participation of all in the material and intellectual possessions of humanity, there would come to every man a singular lightening of conscience; for the condition of cruel inequality, which overloads some with superfluous wealth while it deprives others of everything, even of hope, weighs as remorse, consciously or unconsciously, on the souls of all, especially of the fortunate, and always mixes a poison with their joys.

The most important element in producing peace is that no one should do wrong to his neighbour, for it is in human nature to hate those whom one has injured and to love those whose presence recalls a sentiment of one's own virtue. The moral results of this simple set of justice, the guarantee of food and instruction to all, would be incalculable. And can it be maintained that such a wish is beyond the possibility of realisation when all the material resources necessary are at our disposal, and when in considerable primitive societies, tribes, peoples and nations, it has more than once become, as far as realisable in those remote epochs, an accomplished fact?

If ever—and it appears to lie in the path of evolution—if ever the great organism of mankind learns to do what social organisms of not very large dimensions did and are doing—that is to say, if it complies with these two duties, not to let any one die of hunger or stagnate in ignorance—it will then be possible to attempt the realisation of another ideal, which also is already pursued by an ever-increasing number of individuals—the ideal of reconquering from the past all that we have lost, and becoming again equal in force, in agility, in skill, in health, and in beauty with the finest, strongest and most skillful men who have ever lived before us. Without doubt there is no question as yet of recovering the use of atrophied organs, the former use of which biologists have discovered, but simply of knowing how to keep in their plenitude the corporeal energies which have fallen to our lot, how to retain fully the use of the muscles which, while continuing to work, have diminished in elasticity, and threaten before long to be of no value. Is it possible to prevent this physical decline in man, to avoid the day in which he will be only an enormous brain swathed in wraps to keep him from taking cold?

Zoologists tell us that man was formerly a climbing animal like the ape. Why, then, does the modern man permit himself to fail in this ability to scale—an ability still possessed in a remarkable manner by certain primitive peoples, notably those who gather the branches covered with fruit at the tops of the palm-trees? The child, whose mother never fails to admire the manual prehension which enables him to hold his body suspended even for some minutes,¹⁴ loses little by tittle this early vigour because the occasions to exercise it are carefully withdrawn from him; it is sufficient that his clothes are threatened with destruction by his efforts at climbing, that in our society, forced to be economical, parents should forbid their children to climb trees, the fear of danger being in this prohibition only a secondary consideration. Similar reasons have this result that the greater part of our civilised children remain much inferior to the sons of savages in games of strength and skill; besides, having no opportunity to exercise their senses on wild nature, they have not the same distinctness of vision, the same sharpness of hearing; as animals of beautiful form and refined senses they have for the most part incontestably degenerated. The expressions of admiration which the sight of the young men of Tenimber, exercising themselves in drawing the bow or throwing the javelin, called forth in European travelers¹⁵ will no doubt be remembered, and we ought in truth to avow that even among cricketers, golfers, and hockey-players, who constitute the *élite* of the nations for corporeal beauty, the spectators would find it difficult to go into raptures over the perfectly well-balanced forms of all the champions. No, it is impossible for us to deny that, taken in the mass, numbers of so-called lower nations—Negroes, Red Indians, Malays, and Polynesians—in purity of line, in nobility of attitude and grace of bearing, excel many groups representing the average type of the Europeans.

¹⁴ Drummond, "Ascent of Man," pp. 101, 103.

¹⁵ Anna Forbes, "Insulinde; Experiences of a Naturalist's Wife in the Eastern Archipelago."

There is certainly, on this side, a general retrogression, the result of our being shut up in houses, and of our absurd costume, which prevents cutaneous transpiration, the action of the light and the air upon the skin, and the free development of the members of the body, often cramped and twisted, and even crippled and maimed, by shoes and corsets. Numberless examples, however, prove to us that retrogression is not definitive and without appeal, for those of our young people who are brought under very good hygienic conditions, and undergo physical training, grow in form and strength, equalling the most handsome savages, and, moreover, they have the superiority which confidence in themselves and the prestige of their intelligence gives them. We have only to refer to the climbers of the Alps, the Caucasus, and the Himalayas. Certainly no Jacques Balmat would have ascended Mont Blanc if there had not existed a De Saussure to encourage him in the effort; and now the Whympers, the Freshfields, the Conways, have they not become in strength, in endurance, in knowledge, and in experience the equals, if not the superiors, of the best mountain guides, trained from youth to all the physical and moral virtues which are required in dangerous ascents? Thus the ideal we have conceived, of being able to acquire new qualities, without losing any we possess, but even recovering those our ancestors have lost, can perfectly well be realised. It is not in the least a chimera.

Another superiority of the savage over the civilised man will be more difficult to reconquer, because of our artificial life in enclosed spaces, surrounded on all sides by buildings; or else in a pseudonature spoilt by a thousand details—ugly constructions, trees lopped and twisted, footpaths brutally cut through woods and forests. Nearly everything there has been mismanaged—trees and perspectives; nevertheless, the enjoyment found in the open air, on the brink of running streams, under the branches which murmur and cast their shadows upon the verdure, is such that we allow ourselves to be profoundly affected by it and willingly imagine that we have lived for an instant in the midst of real nature. It is certainly a great happiness to find ourselves again, in communion with mother Earth in lands laid out with rule and line, but sweet as the poetry is that we there enjoy, it is still inferior to that which enchanted our ancestors. The difference lies in this, that the collective sentiment of those who in the name of society and provided with its resources, drawn from the State funds, have manipulated this nature, has not been a sentiment of respect and feeling; they nearly always had in view purely industrial or mercantile interests.

However, there is no need to be despondent, for in many an out-of-the-way spot, pious lovers of earth know how, in all reverence and delight, to enjoy its intimacy; night and day, morning and evening—in all kinds of places—mountain or sea, moor or forest—they have created secure retreats, where, like children who come back to the arms of their mother, they become simple again and share in the great life of things without bringing into it the thousand little preoccupations of private life. The sincere man thus finds again his unity with all the earth's phenomena—with the river that flows away and the mountain that remains, with the clouds that gather and dissolve and the vast firmament where the planets slowly revolve. Lying down out of sight, as if he would re-enter the primitive cradle, he feels so much the more the delight of his return to the kindly maternal earth now that he knows it better in its origins, its forces, its evolution and its products; science does no injury to the aurora, but even increases its glory, adding to it an emotion of boundless admiration.

Thus, even for the real intimate comprehension of nature, modern man can reconquer the past of the savage; but the reconquest will only be definitive and normal on condition that he includes all men, his brothers, in this same sentiment of unity with the whole of things. Here, then, again

the social question comes to the front. It is impossible for any one fully to love nature who does not love men. How can we admire the charming little individuality of the flower, how can we call ourselves brother with the animal, feel drawn with tenderness towards it, as Francis of Assisi was, if we do not also love men our real brothers? Complete union of Man with Nature can only be effected by the destruction of the frontiers between castes as well as between peoples. Forsaking old conventions, it is necessary that every individual should be able, in all brotherliness, to address himself to any one of his equals, and to talk freely of all that interests him, of "all that is human," as Terence said. Life, brought back to its early simplicity, admits in that very fact full and cordial liberty of commerce between men.

Has humanity made real progress in this way? It would be absurd to deny it. That which one calls "the democratic tide" is nothing else but this growing sentiment of equality between the representatives of the different castes, until recently hostile one to the other. Under a thousand apparent changes in the surface, the work is being accomplished in the depths of the nations. Thanks to the increasing knowledge men are gaining of themselves and others, they are arriving by degrees at the discovery of the common ground upon which we all resemble each other, and at getting rid of superficial opinions which keep us apart. We are, then, steadily advancing towards future reconciliation, and, by this very fact, towards a form of happiness very different in extent to that which sufficed our forefathers—the animals and the primitive men. Our material and moral world becomes more vast, and this in itself increases our conception of happiness, which henceforward will only be held to be such on condition of its being shared by all; of its being made conscious and rational, and of its embracing in its scope the earnest researches of science and the possessions of art.

It is, then, with all confidence that we reply to the question which every man asks himself: Yes, humanity has really progressed, from crisis to crisis and from relapse to relapse, since the beginning of those millions of years which constitute the short conscious period of our life.

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