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Environment

ACCORDING to the dictionary, environment is the condition influencing growth and development. For present purposes the term is confined to social man. We don't exactly say "amen" to the definition, but for the moment we may let it pass and pursue our iconoclastic ways.

It was said of old, "All roads lead to Rome." Today, all roads lead to—environment. As the philosophy of the ideal postulates the greatest good, through the instrumentality of the great intelligence, so the philosophy of environment postulates intelligence through adaptive selection. Consequently we have two philosophies struggling for the supremacy in human conduct, idealistically opposed and ideally irreconcilable. The one rests on the strained abstractions of the finite mind; the other is drawn from the intimate relations of the open world. With the former we are unconcerned. Anyone can play at guessing. But the latter is susceptible of proof, and stands or falls with the realities of human experience. And what is experience but the unfolding of environmental effects?

Our distant ancestors were wont to use a convenient stone in the daily tasks of existence—to crack nuts, open shells, and fling at their dangerous neighbors of the wild. But frequently the convenient stone would be absent; and having "shot their bolt" they would feel themselves in a clear and definite way, helpless for further aggression. In a vague and dim way, the idea would be borne in on them that it would be good both to have the stone always with them; and having thrown it, to have it again for another chance. Doubtless wooden clubs were always in use. But a stone had a natural cutting edge and was, therefore, more generally useful and more vitally effective. After countless generations they hit on the invention of tying the stone to the wooden handle; and by experience they would find—again in a clear and definite way—the benefits of the new idea. For it gave them at once three decisive advantages. It doubled the reach of the arm; they could hit harder and more certainly, and they were immediately ready for new attack, or further defence. It was plainly the 'vironing condition which made the fumbling mind to think; and the thinking mind in turn modified the old environing condition.

Modern ambition goes into business, and proceeds on stereotyped business lines. Only tentatively does it reach out to new experiment, or venture on untried methods. Only as it feels its way clearly and definitely does it go forth to conquer on the "initiative" paths of "success." But the continually unfolding conditions of competitive business force ambition to necessary thought; and conscious thought takes cognisance of every possible device to compass the objective interest. Clearly the mind effectually modifies its time condition. But as clearly the driving impulse of the motive is the invincible necessity of that time condition. What happens in one set of circumstances in one place happens in all circumstances, everywhere. As it is in one age or time, so it is in all ages and times. The principle of movement is necessary change. Movement and change is the substratum of the cosmic drama. They counterpoise and modify each other. They are inseparable as law and life; merciless as love and hunger. Between ancient and

modern man there is a great gulf. But they are alike in this, that they exercised their ingenuity, of necessity, in the modification of contingent surroundings. And they differ principally in that the process of ideation has been accelerated.

But this acceleration is not primarily due to the greater quality of modern brain (except in so far as the exercise of any organ stimulates its power to activity), nor to the greater fertility of thought; but chiefly to the wider range of experience: the immemorial discipline of social usage. Ancient man had to make his own experience; modern man possesses the accumulated heritage of time. Early man had to be an empirical pioneer; present man is but a traditional adventurer. Then progress was slow, and method dilatory, because everything had to be tested, in the shadow of death, in the haunted darkness of the unknown. Now it is prevised, and decisive, because time has endowed us with new powers of knowledge, and its enhanced consequences of understanding. There, quantity was the rule of the necessary hour; here—potentially at least—quality is the dominating factor.

Quantity and quality are the two sides of the same fundament; and progress is the experience of their unification. The blossoming of their convertibility. And in that convertibility, and because of it, vitalistic man and, equally, vitalistic environment, interact in the intimate associations of communion. It is not the egotistic idea dominant over the unthrobbing mass. It is not the mind master of circumstance. Nor is it the converse. It is the common gravity of mutual interdependence. The ever changing, ever varying pressure and interplay of the reversed qualities of transmuted material, and the transmuting quality of evanescent force.

The convertibility of environment into experience, involved the progress of experience into definite knowledge, i.e., the defined relations of man and thing with man and mind. That man is subject to his environment—that "conditions influence development" requires no argument to prove. But it is not enough. To halt there is to admit miracles: is to yield to the tragedy of tradition. That man is the creation of the sum total of 'vironing conditions is equally obvious. But it is denied admission by the phantasies of yesterday. It is in those fancies that idealist abstractions are rooted; and that idealism, born of the distorted passions of ages, fanned by misunderstood desires and fed by the cherished images of the man—society baulks sharply and stubbornly against the massing onslaught of insistent reality.

Consequently, it is not the interplay of reason that determines the whole interplay of reaction. That is determined by the dual complex of social man and decisive time. The external conditions of life and being are but one set of circumstances, determinate and definitive. But they have their necessary nexus with the inner conditions of life and being, more potent because more complex. But neither set of circumstances is independent. They are mutually derivative, mutually causative and mutually decisive. So that the phantasies of yesterday are not to be destroyed by the subtleties of forensic skill. That reasoning is effective only as it reflects the mightier logic of time development.

For in time development is implied, not alone the force of reasoning mind in conflict with the unreasoning yesterday: with it is involved the force of social necessity, instinct with new purpose; and experientially antagonistic to the waning abstracts of social antiquity.

In the social world there is an infinite variety of social inertia; lines of force and unstable stability criss-crossing in all directions. Physical endurance; mental attainment; natural endowment; inherited temperament; acquired character; moral fibre and social degree are blended and interfused in the moving drama of determinate conduct. If one factor or one force is absent or abrogated, the resultant is radically changed. They are flying shuttles of life, time fashioned from social need; time-colored by human requirement; time-conditioned by progress. Here and now; there and then; right and wrong; concept and equivalent are the transient figures of epochal necessity. They become opposites; they intermingle; they form parallelisms of direction and intensity; they disappear in the infinite past; they overarch the fathomless future; they languish and die only in the absorbent amalgamations of changing generations.

"To be or not to be" is not the prerogative of man, but of conditioned man. The conduct of life is not the fostering of human volition, but of the compendious substantial of circumstance. The will, the mind, the man—they are but single factors in the wonderment of being and becoming. As the age has grown, so may the mind discern; as the time declares, so many the will decree; as the occasion offers, so may the man devise. Always man is mirrored in the plenitude of social attainment. The abstract of time shapes the law, not the abstracted individual. The experience of humanity invests and imposes; not the experience of man. Just as the cumulates of growth determine the reproduction of life, so the cumulates of time govern the impulse of reaction; and the reaction, in turn, motives—yet recedes into—the new cycle of progress. "As a man thinketh in his heart so he is." Yes. But the thoughts of his heart, are the thoughts of his time condition; and the thoughts of his heart change, only as plastic condition is remolded in the reconstruction of progress. Thought is focused on now, and now is flashed into tomorrow, tutored with the traits of its transition and impregnated with the summaries of time. Thus time movement generates thought effect; thought effect vitalises new movement; and ultimately in the sequences of progress the unity of movement and thought is correlated in the higher unity of thought and movement, converting the quantity of mass environment into the quality of man created condition; changing the government of men into the ministry of material; the mastery of improprerty into the dominion of mind; and vanquishing the crafty subtrefuges of exigent politics as Aurora vanquishes the reluctant night.

So it comes about that the moulded creature becomes the directive power; and with advancing progress the inverted pyramid of idealism is confounded by the new idealism of altruistic reality. The idealism which began with the creative idea ends in

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