

mental attitude that lies between these two false attitudes? Certainly there is. It is not a belief or a creed; it is the simple recognition of the truth. The truth is, that nature is neither friendly nor hostile to man; neither favors him nor discriminates against him. Nature is not endowed with any moral attributes. It is, as I said at the outset, a domain of rigid law. Man is a product of that law, but he has reached a stage on which he can comprehend the law. Now, just because nature is a domain of rigid law, and just because man can comprehend that law, his destiny is in his own hands. Any law that he can comprehend he can control. He cannot increase or diminish the powers of nature, but he can direct them. He can increase or diminish the amount of power that is to be exerted at any given point. He can focalize the rays of the sun; he can divert the courses of the rivers; he can direct the currents of the air; he can vary temperatures; he can change water to steam and set the steam to work in propelling machinery or ships or railroad trains; he can utilize electricity. His power over nature is unlimited. He can make it his servant, and appropriate to his own use all the mighty forces of the universe.

Both optimism and pessimism are passive states of mind. The true state is an active one. Optimism and pessimism assume nature to be in an active state toward man. The true attitude makes nature passive and man active. To the developed intellect nature is as clay in the potter's hands. It is neither best nor worst. It is what man makes it, and rational man always seeks to make it better. The true doctrine, then, is *meliorism*—the perpetual bettering of man's estate. This will be possible in precise proportion to man's knowledge of nature, so that the condition of the race ultimately depends upon the degree of intelligence that it shall attain.

Optimism may be said to be the thesis, pessimism the antithesis, and meliorism the synthesis of man's relation to the universe. The optimist says: Do nothing, because there is nothing to do. The pessimist says: Do nothing, because nothing can be done. The meliorist says: Do something, because there is much to do, and it can be done.

Man alone can block the wheels of his own progress. Neither optimism nor pessimism can be justified in a state of society where free play is allowed to all the human faculties. For a race whose intellect is fully matured, these mental attitudes are only adapted to a condition of profound ignorance of the laws of nature, or of complete subjugation of the masses to the power of the few. Now, it is a historical fact that these two habits of thought have, in the *elite* of mankind, only prevailed under one or the other or both of these conditions. Optimism is pre-eminently the child of ignorance. By ignorance I mean solely the absence of knowledge relative to natural things, processes, and laws, and not lack of capacity to know those things and profit by such knowledge. Pessimism is more especially a product of social oppression. It results from an abandonment of all hope of relief from the power of a superior