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FIVE CENTS

EVOLUTION

(From "The Freethinker.")

II.

Evolution and Change.

THE permanent and universal fact in Nature is change. The most general—the law—of this aspect of Nature is that which meets us in the law of evolution. And so far as the world of living things is concerned, the basic fact is adaptation. But adaptation is a relative fact. What constitutes adaptation must be determined by the environment in determining what qualities or functions shall have a survival value that we arrive at the importance—social, ethical and religious—of environmental influences. For the fact of change, perhaps its possibility depends upon the environment, whatever be its character, undergoing alteration. The change may be of that slow secular character such as meets us in geological or astronomical phenomena. Or it may be a failure of the food supply which gives to certain animals the advantage derived from possessing variations, but which would have been without value had the food supply not been interrupted. Or, what amounts to the same thing, increase of numbers changes the organic environment of every member of the species. And the one quality brought out in all this is persistence. There is no necessary moral significance, and there is no end involved, as is implied in such terms as "higher" or "progress." These are conceptions introduced by us—useful enough in their way, but having no objective value. Ideally, one quality may be higher than another; but if it does not establish a greater degree of adaptation, it brings no advantage to its possessor, and may bring a positive disadvantage. In a thieves' kitchen the honest man is handicapped. In the existing political world a perfectly truthful man would be a parliamentary failure. In the pulpit a preacher who knew the truth about religion, and told it, would soon be out of the Church. Adaptation is not, as such, a question of moral goodness or badness; it is simply adaptation.

Environment.

There is embedded in the theological use made of the doctrine of evolution, as also in its handling by a certain school of sociologists, the notion that the fact of adaptation leading to what we recognize as progress, affords ground for the belief that evolution supplies us with what Huxley very foolishly called a "wider teleology," which will escape the gross illogicalities of the older Paleyan form. This is wholly fallacious. So far as evolution makes for morality, it is only as adaptation is fundamentally and substantially identical with the persistence of certain struc-

tures, whether these structures be that of an organism or of a social group. As we have often pointed out, moral laws are to the social group what physiological laws are to the individual. They are expressions of the conditions that make group life possible, and the reasoning which sees in the existence of morality proof of a "divine plan," or divine guidance, is of the same order that sees design in the fact of death coming at the end of life instead of in the middle of it. What we are dealing with here is again the simple fact of adaptation, although in the case of the human group, the traditions and customs and ideals of the group form a very important part of the environment to which adaptation must be made, and which, therefore, have a distinct survival value. And it is in the creation of this peculiarly human environment that one has to look for the real influence of religion in moulding the life of the race. In that direction the case against religion is indeed black.

Man and Evolution.

Excluding pathological cases, there is no real difference between the fundamental qualities possessed by men. There are differences as to the strength of these qualities, and also as to their relative values in contrasted individuals, and there are differences in the form in which the same qualities express themselves; but that is all. Civilization does not change the man; it only gives a new direction to existing qualities. In a bad social environment qualities are expressed harmfully, in a better environment they are expressed beneficially. The fundamental evil of war in the modern State is that it expends human energies in a relatively injurious manner. The love of contest and of competition, without which human nature would be a poor thing, is expended in the way of destruction instead of in the socially beneficial channels of adventure and healthy intellectual contest. Sympathies are narrowed instead of widened, and hatred of the outsider, a manifestation of which most civilized persons are ashamed during times of peace, becomes a belauded virtue in time of war. In other words, we create an environment—fortunately for only the time being—which gives a certain survival value to such expressions of human capacity as indicate a reversion to a lower type of culture. And this principle allows of a very wide application. It is one that is indicated by the whole course of social evolution. More and more it is being realized that what the individual is to become, the direction in which his energies are to be expended is, so to speak, a function of the environment. Man is not a creature of his environment in the sense

in which the expression was once used, but he is in the sense that the form of the reaction of his nature is determined by environmental influences.

Man and His Environment.

It is this that makes of so great consequence the power of education and the influence of religion. The human brain is the most plastic organ known to science. It is educable to an enormous degree. That, indeed, is the one great distinction between the human and the animal baby. The compensation for being born with fewer instincts than other animals is the greater educability of the human brain. But that, of necessity, throws into greater prominence the educative influence of the environment. And the predominantly operative environment here is the human one as expressed in teachings, ideas, and ideals. We can not alter the nature of the qualities with which an individual is born, but we can by placing a social emphasis on certain aspects of their activity largely determine whether they shall be expressed in a socially injurious manner or not. The love of adventure, for example, may be exploited in the interests of some form of piratical enterprise, or it may be guided into channels of exploration, research, or other forms of social effort. Social approval is in itself a very powerful influence, and can be made to operate with all the intensity of personal gain. That it does operate with many is plain, that it might operate with more is a conclusion that fits in with all our knowledge of human nature. It lies with society itself to see that the environment is such as to exercise a selective influence with regard to those qualities that really make for real culture and civilization.

The Power of Man.

To sum up. It is not the fact that evolution means a "levelling up." Neither does it necessarily mean progress, as we understand the term. Evolution is no more than a formula that expresses the way in which a moving balance of forces is brought about by purely mechanical means. So far as animal life is concerned, this balance is expressed in the term adaptation to environment. And in human society the environment is in a growing measure made up of the ideas, customs, traditions and ideals with which each finds himself surrounded. The game is thus very largely in our own hands. If we create an environment in which it is costly or dangerous to be honest and fearless in the expression of opinion, we shall be doing our best to develop mental cowardice and hypocrisy. If we bring up the young with the successful soldier or money-maker before them as our ideal figure, while we continue to treat the scientist and

WORKERS' LIBERTY BOND CAMPAIGN

Many Contributions Received This Week.

MANY of the outlying points in B. C. have been heard from during the past week, and repeat orders sent in. This indicates that there is a considerable amount of enthusiasm amongst the workers, and that they are doing their bit for the defence of the workers arrested as a result of the Winnipeg strike. Hedley miners sent along \$70, although they only got their bonds the day before the mine closed down. Prince Rupert has sent for more bonds, and the committee there reports good progress being made. Victoria has sent several repeat orders, in spite of the large number of men out of work in that city, and from all parts of the province the reports received are good. The Loggers, being the largest organization, has contributed the most to date, the amount so far subscribed being well over the \$5000 mark. This does not include donations to the defense fund, but for Liberty Bonds alone. While the campaign is supposed to close in B. C. on December the 15th, it will take some little time longer than the few days left before that date to ascertain just how much has been realized, as some of the outlying camps, where large numbers of men are employed, have not had their bonds for more than a week, and in some cases, where postal facilities are none too good, they will not have more than received them. The defense committee of B. C. is confident that the \$20,000, the figure set for this province, will be over-subscribed. Every effort should, however, be made in the next few days, as with the trials hanging out as they are doing, the money suggested as being needed may not cover the expenses of the trials. Everybody get in and boost for liberty of speech and press, for this is what the fight is being waged for.—Defence Committee.

the idealist as more or less harmless cranks, we shall be continuing the policy of forcing an expression of human capacity upon lower levels than would otherwise be the case. If we encourage the dominance of a religion which beyond a profession of loftiness irradiates a narrow egotism that teaches the inutility of conduct without the prospect of a future life, we are doing our best to perpetuate an environment which emphasizes the value of the poorer aspects of human motive. In short, the cards are in our hands if we will only learn to play them wisely. Evolution does not, as we have said, necessarily involve "progress," but it does indicate that human wisdom and foresight may so control the social forces as to turn that ceaseless change which is indicated by the law of evolution into channels that make for human happiness and prosperity.

CHAPMAN COHEN.