

so clearly marked as here, the cases in which some influence, unnoticed at the time of its impact, is sufficient to alter the whole course of a man's intellectual life. The chance hearing of a lecture or reading of a book, a chance conversation with a chance acquaintance, may be the means of setting a man upon a totally new line of moral and intellectual and political belief. Clearly we are creatures of circumstance; and clearly also we do but react, to the stimulus of intellectual forces, in accordance with the primal basis of our temperament. Paul's beliefs may have suddenly changed at his "conversion;" but he simply carried over into Christianity the stress of zeal and enthusiasm which had formerly made him so prominent as a defender of Judaism. It was a mere accident that determined on which side that forceful and restless temperament should work. And this being so, it has sometimes occurred to me to ask whether we are not all singularly deluded in our attempts at reform—even in our *desire* for reform. Is it not all part of the fundamental illusion and mockery of existence? I am not preaching any doctrine of despair, or counselling any one to live his narrow life without regard to the sympathy that makes him run to the rescue of his fellow-men. But surely we may ask ourselves whether it is really worth the trouble, and whether, if all men were wise, they would not recognize that this eternal toiling up a hill, the top of which humanity can never reach, is not simply a bitter, ironic, inveterate delusion?

For an eternal toiling after the unattainable it certainly is. Whence comes the impulse to reform? Simply from the fact that men of wider life wish to raise their narrower brethren out of the pit of their restricted thoughts and emotions. Evil, as Mr. Spencer has rightly shown, is due to non-adaptation to environment. But, in the very terms of that definition, evil must continue to exist to the end of time; and along with it, of course, there will exist the impulse to reform. I do not think that in the whole of Mr. Spencer's work there is a greater blunder than his doctrine of the ultimate "social state" to which men will be fully adapted. As I have argued elsewhere, Mr. Spencer's formula is quite meaningless. A social state is not something external to men, to which they can become adapted, as water out of a square bottle can adapt itself to the shape of a round bottle, but a mere name for the condition of things as made by men themselves at any given moment. There is, in fact, no such thing as "the social state." Now, any change in one part of a community must immediately set up a change in the other parts; and the result in social life, as in inanimate nature, is a fresh