

only partial success in rendering a worse condition a trifle better? Even this is accidental, and may go backward instead of forward. There are as many things that retard as there are that advance the race, and human progress, like the "regulator" of a steam engine, seems to be adjusted so as to defeat itself. Much of it is purely accidental. No one will ever know but that the state of civilization would have been a century ago what it is to-day but for some trifling accident. I once heard a learned and conservative physicist say that Aristotle's teachings had delayed the progress of man's knowledge of the laws of nature a thousand years. What evidence is there that there is any power making for the increase of knowledge? Our acquaintance with the true nature of animals and plants and with man depends largely upon what can be learned of their history throughout past ages of the world. Yet what is the nature of the geological record? Every practical paleontologist knows and always feels that discovery in this field depends upon the merest chance, nay, upon a coincidence of two chances, first, that anything has been preserved, and secondly, that it will ever be found. He labors under the perpetual feeling that the most important of discoveries may in fact never be made, and that he may be at any time, without knowing it, walking over the keys to the secrets of the universe. And after man acquires great knowledge and power over the universe, so that he can enlist all the forces and materials of nature in his service, the inequalities in individual opportunities, coupled with the intense egoism which has alone enabled the race to survive, practically robs society of the results by placing the masses in the power of the few, under which system neither class can really enjoy the fruits of intelligence and industry.

All this may have a pessimistic sound. In fact, it constitutes the contribution that pessimism has made to social philosophy. It has taught us to open our eyes, to look the facts in the face, to listen to no siren song, to see and bravely acknowledge the truth of man's condition and his relation to the universe. So long as we do not exaggerate, so long as these relations, however bad, are the true relations, no possible harm can come of knowing and realizing the truth. It is the only healthy attitude, while, on the other hand, the ignorance of this truth or the refusal to avow it is fatal to progress. But it will not do to stop here. It is not enough merely to learn that things are bad. The two errors of pessimism have been, first, that of overdrawing the picture, and second, that of failing to learn the lesson which the picture teaches.

Having tried to paint the picture true to life, let us next inquire what the lesson is that we should learn from its careful study. The first and most elementary principle of that lesson is, that the very fortuity from which this entire state of things results is laden with the highest hopes for mankind; that no other condition could furnish any such ground for hope; that the opposite or optimistic view, were it the true one, would really lead to despair. The optimist may be compared to a young man

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