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The Genius

HERE is an idea, more evenly distributed than wealth, that there must arise a great man to arouse society into intelligent—or at least comprehensive—action: that society droops, like a lily in the sun, for lack of a Moses (or shall we say a Genghis?) to transform its petrified apathy into fruitful action; that indeed our case is hopeless, until the days of the conqueror shall be fulfilled. It is an idea quite plausible, but who shall deem it probable? It is not new, and it is eminently satisfying to our vanity—which it flatters, in its implication of values—and to our steadfast veneration for deep-rooted custom and conservatism.

History gives little sanction to such hope. Yet it is no argument that what has not been, may not be. Far from it, and none may gauge the tumultuous detail of the future. There is an ever gathering complex of social circumstance which, in interaction with all that is, contrives a steadily growing intricacy of social relation. The progress of technique, and with it the capacity for logical reason, presents a continually changing facade of experience, on which are sculptured out and intermingled with the relics of former experience the new forces of the dominating present. The process of thought is a process of growth, and like all growth it is multiple and multiform, bringing to being as determining circumstance shall decree, the blossoming ideation of progress. And it may be, in this limitless wealth of action and reaction, that as social climax approaches and "outworn creeds decay," the mental process may leap forward suddenly to new and higher vantages. A species of mental mutation (after the fashion of De Vries).

The advent of mind is a new factor in the cycle of development. It is a constantly increasing power in the motive of advancement. It lives in experience and grows from experience and stores up in the mighty granary of the subconscious, like credit in deposit, the living substance of experience. And in the days to come, subtly will it unfold the harvest of the centuries, and shower amidst the realities of a new society the wonders of its boundless potentialities. For social evolution differs from natural evolution in this, that whereas the latter is the entire subordination of the creature to circumstance, the former is the moulding of plastic condition, through the medium of the understanding mind to the benefit and satisfaction of the creature. Bourgeois commercialism—for its greater gain—turned the eyes of society on materialist science, i.e., on natural evolution. Thereby it saw the dependency of the organism on environment. In the specific urge of increasing competition, it was forced to take the initiative, to achieve success. Thereby it saw the lordship of mind over mass. It saw the interaction of organism and environment—for therein lay the way of profit. But it did not see the logical interaction of mind and matter, for in business enterprise it found the open door to success. And, success being the keynote of its culture, it looked no further. And it very quickly found in the turbulence of its young career that enlightenment (in all but the technical) was a menace to its privilege. Consequently it has sedulously cultivated the philosophy of success, turned human conservatism to its own ends, and harnessed social intent to its insatiate imperialism. In effect, it has turned society into a

festering carcase, proving with an awful circumstance of evidence the fundamental interassociation of man and mass. That is the reason there is such an aversion to materialist philosophy; being understood only in its physical sense, it appears to deny the influential control of mind. Conversely, the philosophy of the ideal (falsely so-called) appeals to the ethic of today, because, since it judges by the appearance of the impress, it satisfies the egotist individualism of commercial society. They are in both cases the results of (1) a long standing misconception of the nature of reality, and (2) the incidental subordination of progress to the narrow orbit of temporary authority.

But all history shows—and all evolution too for that matter—that though variation is boundless, its direction is limited by and to all the laws and needs of native being. An animal, a plant, a seed, may produce a multitude of variations, but they prosper and flourish only as they accord with the laws of life, as they move in sympathy with the chords of inner being. And the constitution of inner being, determines the nature of the variation and sends it forth, not only complexed with immemorial heredity, but motived and moving in the particular channels of its own evolutionary limitations. If they run counter to that fundamental necessity they disappear. Vitality (*) different, they cannot come into existence. So too will society, though it is not an organism but a relation of association. It acts and is acted upon by time environment. It is modified by time necessity. But it varies always in accordance, always in correlation with its particular constitution, always as a necessity of time-conditioned form. It is as tropic to its organisation as a flower to the sun. To move or progress prior to the influence or pressure of its time condition, it cannot. And although the mind is active, mobile, potent, directive in its centralisation of causality, it is nevertheless a product of growth, and social growth, and flourishes by and in the progression of contemporary environment. Influential as the mind may be upon its time condition, it is yet motived by condition, and derivable in its thought content from condition.

The effect of time condition on individuals is as varied as the number effected. There is no duality, either in physical or mental temperament. The psychology of the individual is marked and peculiar to itself. To the same circumstances at the same time, each reacts differently. Even though the common interest of the moment creates a common understanding. In the particularisation of individual concepts the cleavage of idea and reaction is sharp and clear. The idea is born of condition; the reaction is as the time. Obviously. And as the time concepts of today are the class concepts of capitalist property, it is natural that the social ethic should be the ethic of class, of private interest. Furthermore, it is natural as capitalist development that particular groups should gravitate round particular interests. And because of the mechanics of capitalist development—the concentration of wealth on one side, and of poverty on the other—it is clearly certain that the social majority must reach the frontiers of social principle. For principle is but the sublimation of interest. But to reach the clear green

(*) "Vital," considered in its physical sense, not in a relative one.

hills of principle we must slough, as the snake sloughs its skin, the heavy burden of property interest. We must leave the gods and the idols of today in the wilderness which gave them birth. For on the plane of the civilized commune class rights change into social equity, and individual interest mingles in, and is conserved by, the harmony of social concordance. And we will do this for exactly the same reasons as the lowly snake does—not because we wish to, by volition—but because we wish to under the virile compulsion of pressing necessity.

Individuals acquire their concepts of principle in precisely the same manner as they come by their concepts of interest. By reaction to the accrued wealth of social experience. But whereas the concepts of interest are confined and narrowed down to the transient conditions and immediate wants of man or class, the concepts of principle embrace the total contingent satisfaction of man in society. The former concentrate on the momentary need of self; the latter on enduring society. Interest always unites on the needs of the day; principle divides on the essentials of tomorrow. That is why interest is always arranged to do battle for the "right,"—the right of class ethic,—and why principle is the patient handmaid of progress.

The process of evolution tends to uniformity of conditions. Daily conditions and race preservation demand compliance with the adaptations of selection; and it is round this slowly shifting centre of attraction that the numberless variety of form and force circulate. There are numerous individuals outstanding, above or below this mean level, but the average mass conforms to the necessitarian adaptations of its day and generation. As in nature, so in society. The individual complies with the general usages of the society into which he is born, and which creates both himself and his cherished customs. From society he derives his gifts of imagination and his hallowed idols of illusion; in society he is lord or slave; by society he is lifted up or cast down. He stands always on association; never in individualism, and he finds his personal sustenance, his happiness, his welfare, in the same proportion as they are guaranteed to him and, in his time, society. Above and below, there are outstanding examples which complicate but do not dominate development; which triumph or suffer (as units), as the cycle of progress favors or uproots. But below the mean average, the social group cannot fall and continue to exist, because it is a reaction to conditions which have passed away; while above the uniformity it may not rise, for then it contains the implication of conditions which have not yet matured.

It is the maturing of these conditions which determines the movement of progress. Their ripening depends on the conditional organisation of society, and the reaction of the social forces at maturity is beguiled by the same conditioning. Development may be swift; it may be laggard. It may be helped or hindered. But it cannot be hastened by our will, or governed to our liking. And from the birth of a star to the birth of a soul, the sorrow of travail is determined by the vitally dominant circumstance of constituted being. Thus the constitution of society, being in terms of interest, in terms of interest it progresses. In the moulding and remolding of pro-

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