THE GENERAL PLAN OF OUR STUDIES

EDUCATION is, and must always be, a means to an end. To some it is a means to personal satisfaction, to others a means to a living; to us it is a means to the Great End—the Social Revolution, which will free labour from the constraints of capitalism, and provide the pre-conditions for a "new heaven and a new earth." What, above everything, we need to know is the nature and source of the social forces pointing towards that end, and the quantity and quality of the obstacles likely to arise. Thus Social Forces, their nature, origin, and end, constitute the general subject of our inquiries.

But what are "social" forces? To answer this question we must know just what we mean by the term "Society"—what it is, what it has been, and (therefore) what it is likely to become. We must be possessed of an accurate working knowledge of (1) social structure and the mode of its maintenance; (2) social changes and the secret of their permanence or otherwise.

On every ground the record of the past—history in the widest sense—provides us with our starting-point and subject matter. A happily-invented myth credits Galileo with having opened the whole movement of modern science with a manifesto in a sentence, "and still it moves." Hegel (the Lenin of the professors) completed, closed and sealed the cycle of metaphysical speculation with the still more revolutionary aphorism, "Nothing is—all is becoming!" Our work is to study in detail these sayings, and the anticipation of these, Heraclitus' "All things flow." They indicate the general plan of our studies. What flows?—that system of inter-relations and interdependencies which in their totality we call Human Society. Whence does it flow?—from the general universe in which human beings and their relations arise as special details of a general flux. Whither does it flow?—to the inevitable end dictated by its nature, the conscious co-operation of all for the commonweal. And if any doubt the inevitability, we refer him to the science of History.

History at first glance presents us with an aggregation of apparently haphazard events. The record of these events in their bare time sequence is properly called the annals of mankind. We are concerned with the past—not theoretically, but practically—as a means of estimating the potentialities of the present and the probabilities of the future. History is to the political and social scientist what the laboratory is to the chemist and physicist; what the record of the rocks is to the palæontologists. It is the record of the race's experiments in social organisation, and the problem is—to extract from the annals of mankind a working concept (hypothesis or law) of social causation.

At first glance it would appear that these annals of mankind provide no more than a record of innumerable displays of mere individual wilfulness. Acts are committed and deeds performed apparently in defiance of all known standards of reason and common sense. If this were all, a science or philosophy of history would be impossible. But amid much that appears inconsequent and irrational there is also much that continues and endures. Languages grow. Literatures accumulate and develop. Religions consolidate—their priesthoods are established and persist, even though the religion become transformed out of all recognition. Customs become laws, and moral codes are elaborated and enforced. And although empires and creeds pass, decay, and are disrupted,

institutions persist, with modifications, even into our own time. Knowledge, in particular, "grows from more to more." It is this persistent element in the annals of mankind which provides the possibility and the theme of History.

Even the wilfulnesses of men—their irrationalities—so far as they are activities of like-natured beings, must be capable of classification and ultimately reducible to some law or generalisation. Here history is served by the scientific study of man as an organism, by Biology and Psychology, which also provide generalisations of man's deliberate and reasoned acts: generalisations of the nature and development of the brain and its capacity.

But history deals, not with individual men living in independent isolation, but with men in groups, masses and crowds—with man as forever dependent upon his fellow-man; and all men upon institutions and things. Over and above the study of man as a thinking, feeling, and willing organism (Psychology), is the study of man in his associations. Furthermore, just as in the human body cells die and the body persists, so the mass combinations of men endure while generations of individuals perish. It is the law of this persistence of social aggregates that constitutes the subject matter of the Science of Sociology in general and history in particular. Sociology is the general science of man's group combinations. History is the particular descriptive science of the process whereby any society or group of societies has come into being. It is a systematic grouping of the materials for complete sociological generalisations.

If we are to reduce the chaotic aggregate of the annals of mankind to an intelligible history, we must find some thing or things which persist all through the record of man's activities. Two such things stand out, plain and obvious—Man and the Earth upon which he moves. Each of these has changed, is changing, and must ever change—but as man is inconceivable apart from the earth upon which he depends for subsistence—the earth from which he arose, and of whose total nature he forms a part—man's dependence upon and distinction from the rest of nature gives the permanent element in all history.

The Earth versus Man

History is the record of a process, a growth, a transformation, a flux. If man is always dependent upon the earth (which is, in itself and speaking in general, to-day what it was when man first appeared) why has there been historical development at all? That which remains can hardly be the cause of that which no longer is. What is the cause of change in man's mass activities?

Man always depends upon the earth; but the earth by no means always presents the same face to man. He needs food—she offers him here fruits in abundance; there, thorns and poison-berries; here, edible game; there, carrion birds and beasts of prey. He asks for bread, and she, on occasion, replies with stones and sand. He needs water; she gives him to-day a deluge, to-morrow a drought. He needs a shelter and a home; she presents him with here a Sahara, there a Mississippi swamp—here a bleak upland swept by icy blasts, there a luxuriant valley rendered a plague pit by malarial swamps. In times of stress induced by her moods, he is driven wandering in search of food; she bars his way with inaccessible mountain ranges, foodless wastes, trackless bogs and beast-haunted jungles. Anon she lavishes upon him a soil which yields abundance in return for little or no effort. Elsewhere she inflicts upon him the extremes of relentless hostility. She is mother, step-mother, and mother-in-law all in a breath!

Where man can live, and at what cost in toil, trouble and effort, depends in the first instance upon soils, sites, climates, and general geographical conditions; *where* he may go, upon geographical restraints.

But this is only the beginning. Geographical conditions, we may grant, decide, within limits, which parts of the earth can be inhabited, by what types of men, and by what intensity of population. The drying-up of waters, the volcanic and seismic dislocation of the relations between land and sea—all these have induced mass movements of men in space. Can geography alone account for history—man's mass movements in time? The climate and geographical conditions of Greece remain the same to-day as in the days of Pericles; what accounts for the history of Greece prior to, and since, the Periclean age?

Man versus the Earth

The limits of variation of the earth considered in itself are, relatively, narrow. But the importance of a given area or location to man depends not alone upon its natural potentialities. The important thing is his power to realise these, and on occasion to modify them. Mountain ranges which bar a people from wandering out may equally bar an enemy from raiding in. The sea which ends all advance to a savage provides a world's highway to the people skilled in the use of ships. The prairie which offers a waste of ill-digestible grass to a primitive savage offers abundance to barbarians who have attained the arts of pasturing domesticated beasts. The periodical overflow of the Nile, which was, no doubt, an unmitigated nuisance to the Palæolithic savage, is the life-saving gift of kindly gods to men who have acquired a plough and learned to till. The barren hillsides of the South Yorkshire moors, classed as *waste* in the "Domesday Book," become Sheffield and all that Sheffield implies to people who have learned the possibilities of coal, iron, and steel.

The significance of the earth to man depends upon his knowledge of how to realise its possibilities. The significance of geography is economic. History arises as an outcome of the interaction between geographical facts and the achievements of human understanding.

The Historical Conditions of Understanding

Upon what does this human understanding depend? There must obviously be brains to think (located in the appropriate part of living bodies), and experience to provide alike objects and materials of thought.

The annals of mankind are filled with accounts of conflicts of *opinion*. Differing beliefs in religion, morals, law, and politics have all provided, within the limits of the same race and society, excuses for struggle and slaughter. Being conflicts of "opinion" they could only have been determined by the growth of knowledge in a negative sense. It is when men do not know that they are left free to guess, and squabble about their guesses; ignorance, in this sense, is an historical factor of great importance. But why should men, being ignorant, be so in such unequal and irregular fashions? And why be in their opinions "so exceeding stiff and strong?" Why should men of approximately average mental capacity be so sharply divided into ignorant and knowing? Have the men of the greater brain capacity always been of one opinion, and the men of lesser capacity all on the other side?

The facts are notoriously contrariwise. Plato would seem to have possessed a far finer brain than George Stephenson—but he built no "Rocket." The

learned Fathers of Salamanca were equipped with far more learning than Christopher Columbus—but he got to the West Indies while they were proving the feat impossible. Constantine, who made Christianity a State religion, was mentally and morally inferior to the Pagans Marcus Aurelius (who preceded) and Julian (who succeeded) him. None the less Christianity became established. Herbert Spencer and Karl Marx differed enormously less from each other in quality of brain development than their common average did from the normal of their contemporaries, yet their opinions of Socialism were as opposite as the poles.

Again, if races develop at a rate proportionate to their variation in brain-power, those of the highest capacity will first emerge from savagery into civilisation, and, by virtue of their greater capacity, progressively widen the difference between themselves and the rest of mankind. The hierarchy of nations will express exactly their varying averages of brain-power. But if this is so, how can we account for extinct civilisations, for Crete and Yucatan? And how account for the varying status of Assyria, Egypt, Persia, Greece, and Rome? If lateness of development argues inferior capacity, how account for the rise of Britain, Germany and Japan? There is, be it noted, no evidence available to show that the abstract average brain capacity of the modern Egyptian is any less than that of his ancestors of the 18th Dynasty, or that the bourgeoisie of Pendleton are more naturally gifted than their ancestors of the days of Penda. Why, then, has there been history? And why *this* sort of history?

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(To be continued.)