



AWAKENINGS IN HISTORY

Francis Galton has taught us how to measure the strength of a nation: that is, how to construct a curve, reflecting the development of those things which make for progress in physique. Some one will, in course of time, show us how to measure the mental and emotional, the intellectual and spiritual life. Then a mathematician will show us how to combine the hand curve, the mind curve, and the heart curve into one composite graphic. That curve, when we get it, will be the first line of the science of history.

Meanwhile, the fear of statistics is the beginning of nescience. But even when, in the course of many generations, the statisticians have accumulated sufficient material for an historical monograph—who will undertake it? Apparently it will have to be the work of a committee of mathematicians, physicists, biologists, psychologists, hygienists, statesmen; with educationists, poets, priests, to look after the higher interests. Meantime, the benighted inhabitants of the nineteenth century look into the past and see the ghosts of themselves. And they call it history. Sometimes they look into the future—for the same reason that women and some men look into their mirrors. And this they call prophecy.

What random guesses may be hazarded as to the general

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appearance of the curve of human development—its shape, its sinuosity, its direction? Suppose it were to coincide with the curve of Probability! Then the fatalists would rejoice exceedingly; for it would mean that human history is as the tossing of dice. It would mean that an infinitude of causes are at work, neutralising each other by their multitudinous interactions. Thus the elemental problem of History would involve a complexity far beyond man's power of investigation at his present stage of evolution.

There are those who imagine the curve of historical development to follow the general law of periodicity. They picture a series of irregular undulations succeeding one another in a gradual ascent from zero—the arbitrary starting-point where the curve cuts the time axis, which an audacious calculator has fixed at somewhere about 250,000 B.C. The troughs and crests of the wave would, on this hypothesis, represent periods of climax and reaction—times of Summer activity and Winter slumber. The rise from trough to crest would reflect successive Springtimes in the ebb and flow of the seasonal æons.

It must needs be that Springtime in the life-history of a people should be associated with a rise in the heart curve. For when a nation's fancy turns to thoughts of love—then is the national Springtime. 'Twas perhaps in the peerless love-songs of the Ionic singers that Europe awoke first to mature self-consciousness. Christopher Columbus stumbled upon a continent from without: Sappho discovered Europe to itself. Civilised society ignored it till the Hellenic lyrists chanted forth their awakening notes. Before this the world had looked on Europe as a bleak battle-ground of barbarians, where poverty made the hunters into freebooters and the fishermen into pirates—a mart where metalliferous ores and skins of wild beasts might be had in barter for beads and bronze arrow-heads—a recruiting-ground where cream-skinned slaves could be kidnapped or purchased. Such was Europe in the eyes of civilisation before the seventh-sixth century awakening, albeit

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the epics of the wandering bards might have foreshadowed untold potentialities in the prematurely-born cities of the Argive shepherd chiefs. Yet we can hardly blame the lovers of literature in Memphis, in Babylon, or in Tyre for not reading Homer. The Iliad was not put in manuscript until Egypt had passed into dotage at the end of an active life of three-score centuries or so, and Chaldea and Phœnicia had been sucked of their life-blood by half-bred Semitic vampires.

Agree then that the Hellenic lyrists and philosophers,—Thales, Pythagoras, Heraclitus, and the rest,—of the seventh-sixth centuries B.C., may be viewed as signalling the first breaking of the European spirit into mature self-consciousness. What is the place of the statesmen, the generals, the dramatists, the sculptors, the artists, of the fifth-fourth centuries B.C.—of Themistocles and Pericles, Æschylus and Sophocles, Scopas and Zeuxis—are these organic types or freaks of the age? To say their names is to think of human action—the poetry of action, the idealisation of action. The head and the heart had been ripened for action—the hand curve rose and ascended to a climax. Is it overstraining the seasonal metaphor to maintain that with the fifth-fourth centuries we arrive at a season of blossoming and fruition—to maintain that this period was the Summer and harvest-time of the first age of the fully-awakened European zeitgeist?

Purblind gropings after the devious track of Western civilisation cannot but lead the historian far astray. Between the fifth-fourth centuries B.C., and the eleventh-thirteenth centuries A.D., is an interval of some 1500 years. But the time test is no criterion of the organic difference between the Europe of the one date and the Europe of the other. The comparison of the Parthenon with the Cathedral of Amiens might be the study of a lifetime; and as the aged investigator stepped into the grave, it would be his to proudly reflect that he had learned enough to enable him to understand what a difficult problem awaited solution. The difference between Plato's Republic

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and the ideal society of the Holy Catholic Church, is the difference between x and y —or say between $\Sigma\delta x$ and $\Sigma\delta y$. But yet amongst the infinitude of divergencies there are some differences more obvious, perhaps, than others. Plato's Woman is a child-bearing man. The Woman of the mediæval church was a quintessence of the Spiritual Power. And so (like Holy Mother Church herself) she was a being who gave, in return for protection and reverence by man, the inspiration that prompts to right action, and the love that casts out fear.¹ Explicitly or implicitly Plato's Republic was built on slave labour and was limited by Hellenic exclusiveness. Catholicism strove to establish a social order in which nor Pariah, nor Ishmaelite, nor Laodicean, nor Philistine should be found. And these were to be eliminated by a process not of exclusion but of inclusion within the circle of the elect. To live without working, and to work without living, were alike to be rendered impossible. And the ideal society was to be achieved not by the strong father-hand but by the gentle mother-heart—that subtle force of affectionate duty by which the Church then believed it possible to moralise the actions of public and private life. To let mother-love have free-play—that is one rendering of the mediæval claim for superiority of the spiritual over the temporal power.

The celibate priest was the incarnation of mother-love in the muscular person of a wise father. He was, or was to be, the living synthesis of hand, mind, and heart; of the physical, the intellectual, the emotional; of faith, hope, and charity. Here was, or was to be, trinity in unity; unity in trinity. Such were the ideals of the Mediæval Catholic Church. Now the educational value of an ideal depends on its unrealisability—no noble man being a hero to his own conscience. So let us not whip the Church with the gambling Pope and the uxorious

¹ The Woman of Catholic chivalry is to be distinguished from the incarnation of Satan, which Woman was to the early Christian Fathers, and from the idolised divinity which she was to the Catholic writers and artists of the Renaissance.

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abbot—of whom indeed we should hear less if we were more instructed in the physiology of Church history, and left its pathology to the specialists, who could use the knowledge to advantage. Let us rather count the derelicts of ecclesiasticism as a standing humiliation to the pride of the individual man, and a compliment to the idealism of the Church—which is the collective man.

What is to be the seasonal interpretation of this period of two hundred and fifty years (1000-1250 A.D.)?—this period which gave birth to the seventh Gregory and the third Innocent, Godfrey of Bouillon and St. Louis of France, St. Bernard and St. Francis—which achieved the Crusades and the Gothic Cathedral, Chivalry and the Grey Friars—which consciously and honestly attempted to organise industry, to moralise society and to govern Europe by an infinite dispersion of local authority concerted and graduated to culminate and balance in the final supremacy of the Holy See? What is the locus of this quarter millennium in the composite curve of human progress? And what the direction and behaviour of the Western curve since the Hellenic ascent?

The legions of Rome, the peace of Rome, her roads, her jurisprudence, her functionaries—gave to the western world a oneness, a community of interests which made possible a common religion, a universal church. The perfected Roman administration afforded to the Catholic priesthood a model of organisation without which the Christians might have remained a dissenting sect amongst a Pagan people.

That which the precepts and examples of the stoical philosophers had splendidly failed to do, the simple heroism of the Christian Martyrs accomplished—though at some sacrifice of principle, it may be, and with some loss of the joyousness of the nature-worshipper. The heart of Europe was awakened

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to the higher nobility of a religion of justice, mercy, and self-suppression.

The free-born farmers of Germany and the sons of the independent fisher-folk of Scandinavia, led into the sunny South by chiefs of towering individuality, broke the chains of Roman slavery and prepared the ground for the growth of modern industry with its crops and its weeds—at times like to devour the crops there!

A rush of Arab shepherds led by religious fanatics against her southern frontiers, woke Europe out of a prolonged wintry torpor, brought fresh knowledge of men and things from the far East, and—strange fate—reopened the long sealed storehouse of Greek speculation and Greek science.

Thus a long story of awakenings and slumberings, of seed-times and harvest, of blossoming Summers and fallow Winters, in the interval between the Hellenic and the mediæval ascent. But the most wide-spread awakening of all was effected by the trumpet-notes of the Catholic Church. And if the mediæval mind curve did not rise to the level of Greek times, yet the mediæval heart curve towered far higher than the Greek had ever gone. A rise in the heart curve we associate with Springtime. Thus, mayhap, there is a sense in which we may look upon the period of Catholic chivalry as a Spring, part of whose Summer and Autumn has yet to come.

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