



THE SOCIOLOGY OF AUTUMN

ARGUMENT.—I. How everyday experience differentiates into the Arts and Sciences; yet how their progress is not only towards diversity, but towards Unity. II. How this Unity may come into our experience, and that from childhood. III. How cities may be viewed in Nature and her Seasons. IV. How their prevalent political economy is that of Autumn. V. Their literary and scientific culture likewise. VI. How decadent Art and Literature normally develop their colour, and produce their decay. VII. Decadence. VIII. How it passes into Renaissance.

I

BEHIND our castle sable its field argent of white seething mist now lies later in the morning, gathers earlier towards the night, and the sea of swaying tree-tops from which its dark crags rise is crisping and yellowing towards the fall. Along the High Riggs on either hand, the distant specks hurry in denser crowd; and through the green lake-bed deep below, the engine drags under its lingering cloud a heavier train.

In some such phantasmagoria as may pass for each of us before the windows of his life, there lie latent our main possibilities both of Art and Science. Most of us, alas, are soon called back from our outlook to the workshop or the book-room, to the bed and table of our lives, and thence too seldom return. But now and then some chosen or forgotten child stays by his window all his life. Hence it is that at times we hear some strange

voice of joy or sorrow and hail a new poet; or if his gaze be silent, but he make for us some colour-note of the phase of beauty he has seen and felt, we call him painter. One tells us of sky and trees, another sketches the passing faces, a third the incident; whence landscape, portrait, genre, and the rest.

While all these mainly observe and feel, others observe and wonder; and thus your curious child wanders away from the world of Art to re-discover that of Science. This also must subdivide its field of observation, and this into narrower specialisms than those of the artist, and in a stranger way. One fixes his eyes upon the siege-scarred castle, and by and by we call him historian; another puzzles himself about the crags below, and becomes a geologist; another sees only the trees and birds—the naturalist; a fourth sits peering into the mist and listening only to the wind—the meteorologist. So it is that science develops that strange mental habit for which plain folk at once and necessarily respect and ridicule the 'strange professor-bodie'—whose power of intensely seeing one class of phenomena, yet only one, leaves him 'absent-minded,' literally, to all the rest.

In such ways, then, we need not wonder that there has arisen the marvellous heterogeneity of contemporary Art and Science; nor how each still goes on differentiating in its own way. Scientific Congresses and Art Exhibitions must needs multiply, as Science goes on isolating and analysing strange new fields of minute detail, Art refracting subtler aspects of nature through more individual moods of mind. Who now speaks of Leonardo's, Dürer's dream of reuniting Art and Science, save as a mere echo of the days of alchemy? Little wonder, then, if our dreams of this should please few critics of either camp; yet, like themselves, we also speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen.

For there is a larger view of Nature and Life, a rebuilding of analyses into Synthesis, an integration of many solitary experiences into a larger Experience, an exchange of the narrow window of the individual outlook for the open tower which overlooks college and city.

In such moments all the artificially isolated mind-pictures of

mist and rock, of bird and tree, of man and his doings, reunite their special 'sciences' into Science. Nor does one lose this sense of unity when one descends again to one's own habitual outlook, but rather sees with new clearness all these diverse 'ologies' of which the half-informed think as of mazes beyond number, and within which even their special investigators are so often lost, as but orderly and parallel developments upon three planes—physical, organic, and social—which three are themselves not only parallel, but united by the world-process of Development, into a single Unity. The unnumbered descriptive specialisms of all three, like the mosaic facets of an insect's eye, are uniting into a single presentment of the world. In the science of life every one knows how of late years mind and body are again coming together, so that the psychologist is now also a physiologist; and even in the anatomist, so long an impenitent necrologist, the converse awakening has begun. So it is with the science of energy on the one hand, with that of society on the other; physics and æsthetics, economics and ethics are alike steadily recovering their long-forgotten unity. The age of mechanical dualism is ending; materialism and spiritualism have each had their day; that of an organic and idealist Monism is begun. The studies of sun and stars, of rock and flower, of beast and man, of race and destiny are becoming once more a single discipline; complex indeed, but no more a mere maze than a mere chaos, no more a mere fixed unity than a maze; but a growing Cosmos, a literal Uni-verse, of which the protean variety of Man and Nature are seen to be orderly developments; each a phase of being, of becoming; each at once a Mode and Mood of the Universal Energy.

II

But this unity, the scientific man and the artist mostly agree in saying, may be all very well on the abstract and speculative level, but what can it do for us who are not content with philosophy, who live and labour in the concrete world? How can your fine talk of synthesis help us with that? Leave philo-

sophy, the answer is, leave for a little your exhibitions and your congresses, and let us first begin with our children at school; for them all your descriptive sciences and much of your art will be absorbed into their 'Geography and History.'—Dull catalogues, you think? But forget your own woful schooling, and recall their real significance. Do they not cover Art and Science if they tell us, or rather teach us in some measure truly to imagine, the story of Nature and Man through Space and Time?

Hence it is that the narrative of individual travel and experience, like that of Herodotus or Marco Polo, Robinson Crusoe or Humboldt and Darwin, has at all times and to all minds and ages so wide an appeal; for here is the very stuff of experience from which special science, art, and literature are made; while of their development into a higher and fuller unison there are already some great masterworks in which the style is worthy of the science. Such, for instance, are Buffon's 'Histoire Naturelle' in the last century, Elisée Reclus' 'Géographie Universelle' in this. In such an education as we are coming to, instead of books innumerable and pictures few or none, as at present, the books as in the ancient church will be few, but the pictures well-nigh infinite; and for this approaching demand of the school walls of the world let the foresighted painter be getting his imagination as well as his technique ready.

Again, then, as of old the child shall know how the earth and sun determine the seasons; these the plant and animal life; and thus also, indirectly as well as directly, our own essential life and labour. Into this simple chain, henceforward unbroken, all minor specialisms, their loose facts woven firmly into chains of causation, shall be securely linked. To develop this simple lesson, this House the Sun Built, all our specialists are needed, astronomer and meteorologist, zoologist and botanist, economist, writer, and critic. And (as in the educative initiations of the ancient mysteries) the lore of the seasons furnishes the central thread. Our glorious Autumn of harvest and woodland, her pathos of fall and decay have indeed been familiar from that

very dawn of art and poetry, which her wealth and wine, her joy and sorrow, have done perhaps most of all the seasons to awaken. Yet our special sciences thrown together into the press yield new and rich elements to the old thought-vintage. They tell us where the harvest wind was warmed by the long-sunned sea, they signal from their observatories the Jötuns mustering white upon the hills, and warn us of their stormy breath; they follow the migrating bird across the sea, the fish into its depths, the seed into its appropriate soil. They follow, too, more deeply, the way in which our own lives are adapted to this Drama of Nature. They not only see as of old how the grapes or corn determine the autumn of the husbandman, or the descending cattle lead their herdman home; but ask if the herrings the fisherman has to follow are themselves borne landward upon a salter wave, see how the roots of the forest tree grow while the dryad seems in her winter sleep, or find how there lie amid the decay of autumn the witch-dreamed secrets of evil and good, sickness and wealth, disease and fertility. Thus, too, our united physical and social geography will lead us straight into the very philosophy of History and amid the problems of Criticism. For it is the fundamental thesis of Human Evolution (there is also a supreme one) that the surroundings—the soil and climate, and hence the seasons—determine all the primary forms of labour; this labour again determines the nature of the family; this the structure of the society; and all these the individual man in life and thought. That literature may arise from the seasonal work of life, all see in the harvest dance or the shepherd's song, in Virgil or Burns, but few carry this far enough. Taine's great history of our literature has, of course, its errors (he was too much before the days of Le Play and 'La Science Sociale'), but his general idea was sound. 'Life the green leaf, say we, and Art the flower.' All the great flowers of literature and art rise straight from their great rootstocks, each deep within its soil. German commentators who teach, and critics who assume, that thought may be understood apart from its underlying life are, of course, not far to seek: yet such a view is untrue even

for the most artificial flowers, false alike for the subtle devices of the decadent poet, and the sarcasms of his reviewer.

III

Yet the seasons—they may be all very well for trees and birds, for oxen and for them whose talk (or even song) is of such; but our rock-built cities—surely these are independent of your seasons—there is no place here for such rustic fancies! So indeed men were wont to think of the rocks themselves, but since Lyell determined certain 'Principles' we know how upon these the winter rains and frosts and snows all tell most swiftly and surely, albeit silently—'they melt like mist, the solid lands.' And the city itself, does it really need anthropology and culture-history to remind us that its very existence is largely conditioned, its whole mode of life determined, by the approach of winter, for why else the crowding street, the heavier train? What are our stone houses but artificial caves, what we but the modern Troglodytes, who in our smoky labyrinths forget the outer world, and think no more of the seasons (save in society slang) because we have made ourselves a city life as near as may be to a perpetual winter?

We are indeed the New Troglodytes; hence our restless and ant-like crowding, our comfortable stupor of hibernation, our ugly and evil dreams. Here is a main clue to the sociology and psychology of those wicked fairies who are such characteristic developments of the populations of the sunnier southern cities, of those sullen gnomes so common in the gloomier northern ones. So, too, we may understand much of the physical degradation of their inhabitants. We know the secrets of the metals, and forge new weapons and invent strange mechanisms and cunning fables like the dwarfs of old. And like them we are stunting ourselves anew.

IV

But our winter cave is a store of provision, and if some lack foresight, others have it overmuch. Hence arises the common 'mania of owning things'—a growing madness as of those

American squirrel-millionaires that spend their lives in feverishly heaping up great barns of plenty which they could not consume in years, and which they must leave to moulder and rot.

But in most cases it is not excess but lack of foresight that does the mischief. Population presses on subsistence, and so arises the strangest and most characteristic biological phenomenon of autumn, that keen competition at the margin of (degenerating not progressing) existence, which our modern cities have brought to that intensity of literally putrescent horror unknown before in history or life, at which we complacently sniff and pass by as 'merely an ordinary slum.'

The decaying leaf-heap of the garden, the manure-heap of the stable, are preyed upon, each by its appropriate mould. This swiftly digests all it can from the mass, scatters its multitudinous progeny abroad upon the wind, and dies of hunger. Yet not of hunger only, for meantime has been sprouting a lower form which has the same history, and is in its turn replaced; each generation thus expressing a lower stage of competition, a more complete decay, a more thorough re-burning of the ashes left by its predecessor.

In the same way it is to many minds of a quite clear and rational, though surely somewhat limited type, that the sole theory, nay, the whole practice also, of 'economic progress' lies in the steady development of a lower and lower life. Do we not tell the wretched mill-girls of our Dundees and Oldhams how they must speedily give place to the cheaper drudges of Calcutta and Shanghai, or save themselves and slay these by diving into a yet lower circle of poverty? So where can we find a better opening for our capital than by removing it to the East, or one in more obvious conformity with Nature? And what remedy is there? None that any one knows of—in autumn. For now is the golden age of Competition, as of Death.

V

In the same way it is in the intellectual world. Ideas once fresh from life wither and dry, but may still be utilised, infused

anew, albeit in dilute form, by the help of commentaries. So commentary succeeds commentary, and criticism is piled upon criticism, copy upon copy; the lower industry must have its lower journalism, its lower art to match—so at length the slum newsagent's window, full of the strangest parodies of the art and science and literature of the educated classes. Are not the 'Police News' and its French congeners at the very fountainhead of Realism? the 'Family Herald' or 'Boys' Own Library' of Romance? Punch has surely not forgotten that he came from the Naples crowd? 'Tit-Bits' is to the commercial traveller exactly what 'Chambers's Encyclopædia' and the 'Britannica' are to the better-informed classes, nay, the British Association, the German University, with Cambridge and Johns Hopkins to boot, to the learned ones—a well-scissored chaos of interesting details, of 'Speciellen Arbeiten.' The culture of any city or period is really far more of a piece than we like to believe; yet the thought of the populace, like its labour, is full of the future as well as of the past, its literature of keynotes as well as echoes. And though the learned see their lore is vulgarised to the people, and often, of course, spoiled in the process, they seldom know the converse truth. That is that the strength and the weakness of their specialism are but a reflection and outcome of those of our modern industrial world, of the division and subdivision of labour, which have long kept so far in advance of the organisation of it.

Still harder is it to learn how the new synthesis we have seen as incipient in the world of thought must grow with advancing energy in the world of action. The wholesale social reformer, indeed, loudly proclaims this. He promises us much of both, but as yet lacks patience and skill to make much definite contribution to either. On the world's stage, as on the player's, labour and thought are indissoluble; and as the first is folly without the second, so the second is futile without the first. Would we be successful playwrights, either on the great stage, or on the small? We have to be more than wrights or authors

merely; we must organise our labour to orchestrate our thought. Hence it is that each Renaissance of Culture is the Story of a City.

VI

Amid the many problems of city life and degeneration some consideration of those of Sex is especially in these days forced upon us. The naturalist student must here again, as always, look below literature into the life from which it springs, and so he sees, in all the strange phenomena of passion and horror which the latter-day novelist so unsparingly reveals, the extreme cases of Variation under Domestication.

For with food and shelter for winter, man becomes the first of his own domesticated animals, and the consequences of domestication inexorably follow. First comes the extension of the breeding season more and more fully throughout the year (so distinguishing, indeed, domestication from mere captivity), witness in varying measure all truly domesticated races, notably cat and mouse, dove and rabbit. That individuality blossoms not with the self-regarding, but the sex-regarding life, the development of child into Woman or Man is, of course, the main example; and here is a prime condition of intenser and fuller development, of organic and psychical individuation. Watch for a little your common doves at play, and see how passion and desire inspire gesture, these pouting their bosoms, and those spreading their tails. But in some, gesture has become habit, and habit been established as variety; and so fantails and pouters are the result—for most purposes distinct and higher species. Domestication also involves precocity, and other consequences, and with all these degeneration seems more easy and frequent than advance. But we need not here trace the ignoble side of the evolution of sex (say rather Evolution through Sex). We are but naturalists and rustics; let the fashionable novelist go on till the mad doctor is ready.

Domestication involves disease of all sorts, or at any rate, increased liability to disease—again a matter in which breeder

and physician are at one ; and we see how increasingly medical treatment and hygiene agree in prescribing more and more of that Return to Nature, which, even as it is, is our yearly source of health and sanity.

VII

It is time to come to another great doctrine of the Decadence. We have heard abundantly of Art for Art's sake, and we all know how superior Art is to any restraints of morality—how indifferent to any call to action. Well, so far true. The thesis is not only defensible, but, on a fresh side, that of Science, of which we have already noted the kindred limitations. 'Here is the germ of the disease,' says the microscopist, 'but do not ask me for the remedy.' 'Je n'impose rien, je ne propose même rien, j'expose,' calmly explains the student of social science, despite the cry for bread. Artist and man of science alike can but mirror the world without. Hence it is that for the æsthetic appreciation of the world - phantasmagoria, the questioning intellect must be calmed, the call to action ignored ; the rich variety and contrast of modern life must be impartially observed, dispassionately absorbed ; and hence sheltered amid the wealth and comfort of our city life our æsthete develops as never before, his impressionist mirror growing more and more perfect in its polished calm. So develop new subtleties of sense ; and given this wealth of impressions, this perfection of sensibility, new combinations must weave themselves in the fantasias of reverie. Our new Merlins thus brighten our winter with their gardens of dream.

Here then is the standpoint from which to appreciate that keenly observant yet deeply subjective 'Realism' which has been so characteristic of literature and art, as indeed also its complementary movement, that strange and wayward subjective Romanticism which has run parallel with it. So far both movements amply vindicate themselves against the Philistine criticism they have been wont to meet ; yet, alas, they too easily make that step further which justifies it. For this attitude of

life becomes fixed by habit, the lotos land is not easily left. For the gentler natures a deepening melancholy suffuses life, though in the stronger types passion may distil new subtleties of art or song. In time, inaction rouses the morbid strain latent in every life, and so the degeneration of the artist may set in from the physical side; and if strength remain, it must find outlet, or be lulled asleep. So arise and increase the temptations of the urban æsthete; who not only like any other man is no saint to resist them, but whose training we have seen has steadily relaxed both the intellectual and the moral fibre of resistance: and hence it is that the end of every epoch of decadence has been the same—an orgie of strange narcotics and of the strangest sins.

‘I did but taste the honey of romance;
And must I lose a soul’s inheritance?’

VIII

Is all æstheticism then evil, and only activity good? Has art only been an ignis fatuus, and is the jeer of the coarse utilitarian, the triumph of the joyless ascetic, to be the last word? Not so: the road of life ever lies forward, through the present phase of evolution, not back from it, be its dangers what they may. This so-called Decadence of literature and art which, as we have seen, science fully shares, is no hopeless decline, but only an autumn sickness, and one of rapid growth and adolescence. For man is increasingly master of the world and of his fate; he does not merely rest in his environment and take its mould, but rises superior to environment and remoulds it. So art and science, which we have seen unite in imagination, find unity in Action also, in that detailed reorganisation of urban and rustic life into health and beauty, which is the ideal of the Incipient Civilisation, and which distinguishes it from the confusion of the Contemporary yet Disappearing one. Here in fact lies the task of our urban autumn as harvest is that of the field; and to this men return with health and hopefulness

gained from contact with nature. Autumn is indeed in many ways the urban spring, and spring, when we are weary with city life, is the urban autumn. Thanks then, and even honour, to the art and science of the Decadence, since from it we have learned to see the thing as it is; it has even helped us likewise to imagine it as it might be: it remains only to ask if in some measure we can make it as it should be, and here lies intact such originality as is left open to us—that of Renascence. To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven; so in this rhythm of passive with active life, of contemplation with constructive energy, lies the health and the future of the Individual and of the Race.

Artist and æsthete, writer and critic in this social Autumn, this ending of an age, all shrink from its active life, and indeed rightly. What profit these men of industry who can but mechanically construct, these men of science who but analyse, these emperors and revolutionists who dream but to destroy—Philistine decadents all! Little wonder that with the world-weary theologian or pessimist they proclaim their passive doctrine as final, their standpoint as permanent—and even as they speak their flowers fade, their garlands fall; then comes despair and silence.

‘Some little talk awhile of ME and THEE
There was—and then no more of THEE and ME.’

The first word of the Sociology of Autumn is of the beauty of Nature, the glory of Life, both culminating (as our urban culture only more fully teaches us) in their Decadence. Hence there inevitably comes the second word, the pessimist antithesis: yet a third—the vital one—remains. Amid decay lies the best soil of Renascence: in Autumn its secret: that of survival yet initiative, of inheritance yet fresh variation—the seed; who wills may find, may sow, and in another Autumn also reap. This last word, then, leaves Omar's death-song and returns to the prose of homely life.

‘Il faut cultiver son jardin.’

PATRICK GEDDES.