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Weber Freiligrath Frey
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas
Fehrs Faber Flaubert Eliasberg Eliot Zweig Ebner Eschenbach
Feuerbach Maximilian I. von Habsburg Fock Ewald Vergil
Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London
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The Growth of Thought As Affecting the Progress of Society

William Withington

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Preface.

A contemporary thus reveals the state of mind, through which he has come to the persuasion of great insight into the realities, which stand behind the veil: "What more natural, more spontaneous, more imperative, than that the conditions of his future being should press themselves on his anxious thought! Should we not suppose, the 'every third thought would be his grave,' together with the momentous realities that lie beyond it? If man is indeed, as Shakespeare describes him, 'a being of large discourse, looking before and after,' we could scarcely resist the belief, that, when once assured of the possibility of information on his head, he would, as it were, *rush* to the oracle, to have his absorbing problems solved, and his restless heart relieved of its load of uncertain forebodings."* [Bush's Statement of Reasons, &c., p. 12.]

Not less frequently or intensely, the writer's mind has turned to the problem of applying know truth to the present, reconciling self-love with justice and benevolence, and vindicating to godliness, the promise of the life that now is. If, meanwhile, he has been "intruding into those things which he hath not seen," like affecting an angelic religion, — then it were hardly possible but that he should mistake fancy for fact. But if his inquiries have been into what it is given to know, then he cannot resist the belief, that some may derive profit from the results of many fearfully anxious years, here compressed within a few pages. He might have further compressed, just saying: Mainly, political wisdom is the management of self-love; civilization is the cultivation of self-love; the excrescences of civilization are the false refinements of self-love; while unselfish love is substantial virtue, — the end of the commandments, — the fulfilling of the law: Or, he might have enlarged indefinitely; more especially might have been written on practically applying the principles to the advancement of society. He may yet produce something of the kind. Of the substance of the following pages he has only to say, that, if false, the falsehood has probably become too much a part of

his nature to be ever separated. As to such minor considerations, as logical arrangement and the niceties of style, he asks only the criticism due to one, whose hands have been necessitated to guide the plough oftener than the pen, through the best years of life.

The Growth of Thought, As Affecting the Progress of Society.

Part I.

Introductory.

The meditation on human life—on the contrast between what *is*, and what *might be*, on supposing a general concurrence to make the best of things—yields emotions both painful and pleasing;—painful for the demonstrations every where presented, of a love of darkness, rather than light; pleasing, that the worst evils are seen to be so remediable; and so clear the proofs of a gradual, but sure progress towards the remedy.

The writer is not very familiar with those authors, who have so much to say on the problem of life—the question, What is life? He supposes them to follow a train of thought, something like this: The life of a creature is that perfection and flourish of its faculties, of which its constitution is capable, and which some of the race are destined to reach. Thus, the life of the lion is realized, when the animal ranges undisputed lord of the sunny desert; finds sufficiency of prey for himself and offspring, which he raises to inherit dominion; lives the number of years he is capable of enjoying existence, and then closes it, without excessive pains, lingering regrets, or fearful anticipations.

Life differs from happiness. It is supposable, that the lion, tamed and petted, trained to feed somewhat after man's chosen manner, may be as happy as if at liberty in his native range. But such happiness is not the animal's life; since this implies the kind of happiness proper to the creature's constitution, in distinction from that induced by forced habits.

To happiness add knowledge and intellectual culture, and all together do not realize the idea of life. The tame lion may be taught many arts, assimilating him to the intelligence of man; but these remove him so much further from his appropriate life. Thus there may be a cultivated intelligence, which constitutes no part of the

creature's life; and this without considering the same as a moral agent.

Macaulay remarks, that the Jesuits seem to have solved the problem, how far intellectual culture may be carried, without producing intellectual emancipation. I suppose it would be only varying the expression of his thought to say, Jesuitical education strikingly exemplifies, how much intellectual culture may be superinduced upon the mind, without awakening intellectual life—without developing a spontaneous aptness to appreciate, seek, find, embrace the truth. The head is filled with the thoughts of others—many ascertained facts and just conclusions. It can reason aright in the circles of thought, where it has been trained to move; but elsewhere, no spontaneous activity—no self-directed power of thinking justly on new emergencies and questions not yet settled by rule—no spring within, from which living waters flow.

The difference between intellectual culture and intellectual life appears in the fact, that in regard to those mastering ideas, which to after times mark one age as in advance of the preceding, the classical scholars, the scientific luminaries, the constitutional expounders of the day, are quite as likely to be behind the general sense of the age, as to be in advance.

The question, What is human life? arises on a contemplation like this: There is no difficulty in determining the life of all the other tenants of earth; unless, indeed, those which man has so long and so universally subjected to his purposes, that the whereabouts, or indeed the existence of the original stock, remains in doubt. The inferior animals, left to themselves in favorable circumstances, manifest one development, attain to one flourish, live the same life, from generation to generation. Man may superinduce upon them what he calls *improvements*, because they better fit them for *his* purposes. But said improvements are never transmitted from generation to its successor; left to itself, the race reverts to proper life, the same it has lived from the beginning.

Man here presents a singular exception to the general rule of earth's inhabitants. The favorite pursuits of one age are abandoned in the next. This generation looks back on the earnest occupations of a preceding, as the adult looks back on the sports and toys of child-

hood. It is more than supposable, that the planning for the chances of office, the competition for making most gain out of the least productiveness—these earnest pursuits of the men of this age—in the next will be resigned to the children of larger growth; just as are now resigned the trappings of military glory. Where then is the human mind ultimately to fix? Where is man to find so essentially his good, as to fix his earnest pursuit in one direction, in which the race is still to hold on? Such seems to be the question, What is life?

The elements of that darkness, which excludes the light of life, may be considered as these three: First, the excessive preponderance of self-love, as the ruling motive of human conduct. Secondly, the short-sightedness of self-love, in magnifying the present, at the cost of the distant future. And, Thirdly, the grossness of self-love, in preferring of present goods the vulgar and the sensible, to the refined and more exquisitely satisfactory. And there are three ways, in which we may attempt the abatement of existing evils; or, there are three agencies we may call in for this purpose.

In the first place, leaving individuals to the operation of the common motives, we may labor at the social institutions, to adjust them to the rule, that, each seeking his own, after the common apprehension of present interests, may do so consistently with acting the part of a good citizen—contributing something to the general welfare; or, at least, not greatly detracting therefrom. Here, the agency employed, the Greeks would have called by a name, from which we have derived the word *politics*; which word, from abuse, has well nigh lost its original sense, *The science of social welfare*. *Policy*, we might say, for want of an exacter word.

The second way, in which we may seek the same result, is, to inculcate juster apprehensions of present good—to inform and refine self-love; to show, that the purest of present enjoyments, are like the loaves and fishes distributed by divine hands, multiplying by division and participation—the best of all being such as none can enjoy fully, till they become the common property of the race. For want of a more accurately defined term, the agent here introduced may be called Philosophy; understanding by the term, the search, what would be the conduct and preferences of a truly wise man, dispas-

sionately seeking for himself the best enjoyment of this life, uninformed of another to follow.

Or, thirdly, we may seek to infuse a nobler principle than self-love, however refined—even the charity, whose essence is, to love one's neighbor as one's self; while, at the same time, this life being earnestly contemplated as but the introductory part of an immense whole, additional security is provided for the coincidence of interest with duty. In a word, the third agency to be employed is *Religion*.

The whole subject thus sketched is one of which the writer is not aware, that it has been distinctly defined, as a field for thought and investigation. He has little to learn from the successes or the failures of predecessors. Be this his excuse for seeming prosy and dull; possibly for mistakes and crudities. He has the doubly difficulty of attempting to turn thought into trains to which it is not accustomed; and yet of offering no results so profound as to have escaped other observers; or so sublime as to be the due prize of genius, venturing where few can soar. If he offers any thoughts new, just, and important, they have rather been overlooked for their simplicity and obviousness. One may dive too deep for that which floats on the surface. Here are to be expected none of the splendid results, which dazzle in the popular sciences. The cultivator of this field can hope only to favor, imperceptibly it may be, the growth of thoughts and sentiments, tending slowly to work out a better condition of the human family. And he begs to commend that advice of Lacon, which himself has found so profitable: "In the pursuit of knowledge, follow it, wherever it is to be found; like fern, it is the produce of all climates; and like coin, its circulation is not restricted to any particular class. * * * * Pride is less ashamed of being ignorant, than of being instructed; and she looks too high to find that, which very often lies beneath her. Therefore condescend to men of low estate, and be for wisdom, that which Alcibiades was for power." (Vol. I., p. 122.)

The difficulty with us Americans, in the way of being instructed, has been, that too proud, as if already possessed of the fullness of political wisdom, we have withal cherished a self-distrust, forbidding us to harmonize our institutions and modes of thinking into conformity with our work and altered situation. We have seen the British nation, choosing by the accident of birth a baby for its future

sovereign, and training it in a way the least possible calculated to favor relations of acquaintance and sympathy with varied wants of the many; and our first impression, I fear, has been our last: What drivellers! Obstinate blind to the clearest lights of common sense! Whereas wiser for us would it be, to derive from the spectacle these general conclusion: that hard is it for the human mind to proceed in advance of ideas received and fashionable; that the so-called independent and original thinkers—leaders of public sentiment—are such as anticipate by a little the general progress of thought, as our hill-tops catch first by a little the beams of the rising sun, before they fill the intervening valleys; that men's superiority in profound thought or liberal ideas, in one direction, affords no security for their attaining to mediocrity in others; and that one familiar with the history of thought, may pronounce, with moral certainty, that such and such ideas were never entertained in such or such society, where due preparation did not exist. As we may confidently say, No mountain-top can tower high enough, to catch the sunbeams at midnight; with equal confidence we may say of many ideas now familiar as school-boy truths: no intellect in ancient Greece or Rome soared high enough above the mass to grasp them.

Part II.

Welfare as Dependent on Policy.

As generally at all points, so the materialism of the age particularly appears, in that the political economists take *wealth*, defining their science in the vulgar acceptation, rather than in the good old English sense, *welfare, well-being*. If they occasionally venture a remark of a more liberal bearing on the general subject of public welfare; such is the exception to the general rule. Money, with its equivalents and exchangeables, is their usual theme in treating of wealth; thought the common use of the word economy might suggest a higher science. For he does not exhaust our idea of a good economist, who manages to have at command abundant materials for rendering home happy; while, for lack of wisdom to turn such materials to account, that home may be less happy than the next-door neighbor's, where want is hardly staved off. We exact, for fulfilling that character, wisdom in using the material means—provision for physical, intellectual, and moral training of the household—the just apportionment between labor and recreation—the true contentment, which frets not at present imperfection, while it still presses on to that perfection conceived to be attainable. Our writers on political economy would do well, to give the word as liberal a latitude of sense, as it legitimately assumes, when used in its primitive meaning of *household management*.

But, rather than attempt to raise a scientific term so much above its received sense, I use another word, and say, Policy must begin with the admission, that self-love is the mightiest mover of human conduct; and not a self-love enlightened, deep, calculating, directed to the sources of fullest contentment; but following the groveling estimate, that riches, power, office, ease, being the object of envy or admiration, are the chief goods of life.

Every business man admits, that his security for men's conduct must be found in their self-interest. He admits thus much practical-

ly, so far as his own business is concerned; the exceptions being so rare, as not to justify neglect of the general rule. Yet, neither business men nor politicians grasp the principle clearly, nor consequently apply it consistently. And he who would make a new application of it, is met with charges of great uncharitableness.

This backwardness to generalize a rule, found so necessary practically to be followed, may be resolved into that flattering conceit of human dignity, which is yielded reluctantly, inch by inch, as plain demonstration wrests it away. And further, self-love conceals itself, because generally it operates first to pervert the judgment. The consciousness of preferring private interest to worthier considerations, is too painful to be endured. The man therefore strives, but too successfully, to misrepresent the case to himself. He contrives to make that seem right, which tends to his own advantage. But though indirect, the operation of self-love is none the less sure. Whether the individual be any the less blamable, because self-love assumes this disguise, is not now to be considered.

There are individuals, to whom implicit confidence in their unguarded honesty, proves but an added motive to be more tremulously sensitive, not to abuse such confidence. There are, whom respect for their calling binds wholly to more carefulness, to prove worthy of such respect. So always if one is thoroughly pervaded with the right spirit. But dealing with bodies of men, as men yet are, these two rules should shape political institutions and social relations.

First, so far as men can command confidence and respect, for the sake of birth, calling, or office, so far they are relieved from the necessity of seeking the same by personal qualifications; and accordingly a body of men so protected, will perceptibly fall short of the average, in the staple elements of respectability.

Respect for station or calling so ample is here meant, as to satisfy the average desire of approbation. The extent, to which this is satisfied by the respect paid by the child, to the parent, for the relation's sake, is so moderate, as one of the elements tending to the formation of character, that it may be expected to operate generally as it universally would, where the right spirit fully reigns. The remark holds good, with moderate abatement, in the relation of teacher and pupil.

In the infancy of the Christian church, the relation between pastor and flock was closely analogous to that between parents and children. On the one side were men of a disinterested and paternal spirit, so earnestly living the new life hid with Christ in God, that hardly the possibility could be conceived of a desire to exalt and magnify self, over the ignorance and degradation of their spiritual charge. On the other side were men, children in knowledge, incapable of estimating the ministry simply after the consciousness of benefits received. We are not then to condemn the arrangement, which clothed the ministry with an official dignity, the office being revered independently of the claims of the man; nor to wonder, if the arrangement outlived the necessity, or passed the bounds of moderation; or if it was not fully calculated, the danger, lest men of the primitive spirit yield places to those of an inferior stamp; and how truly eternal vigilance is the cost, at which all things here must be saved from their tendencies to deterioration. Accordingly the history of the Papacy for centuries has been, that its ministers are sure of unbounded respect from the populace, independently of their personal claims. The consequence is, that while a few are thus moved to heroic and almost angelic devotion to the spiritual good of their flocks, the many would never command respect for what they are as men.

Similar remarks may be applied to the infancy of civil society. The prevalence of monarchy and aristocracy has been too universal, to be charged wholly upon force or chance. And yet in the origin, rational considerations can hardly be supposed to have been distinctly entertained. Still there may have been a dim consciousness of thoughts like these: It is so necessary that civil rulers be at all events respected, and so uncertain how to secure due respect to men meriting it, that we must invest a class of men with a factitious official dignity, and take the risk—rather the certainty—of its proving, in most cases, a cover for personal unworthiness, some degrees below the ordinary standard of humanity. If there existed a dim consciousness of such reasoning, it might have been well entertained.

The second rule of Policy—the master maxim of political wisdom—is, that no class of men must be expected to concur heartily, for extirpating the evils, from which its own revenues and importance are derived. Speaking of men acting in a body, there is no

room for the many exceptions, necessarily admitted to the rule, that with the individual self-love is the ruling motive. The individual sometimes yields to nobler considerations, than the calculations of self-interest. In the corporation, the *esprit du corps*—the clannish spirit—is sure to master it over public spirit. Devotion to the honor, aggrandizement, wealth and power of the order, company, or corporation, is more sure to control their acts as individuals. It is less liable to self-rebuke for conscious meanness. It looks somewhat more like the public spirit which ought to be. It is less liable to occasional counteractions from impulses of honor, humanity, or regard to reputation.

Accordingly a body of men, so constituted as to find its best flourish short of the perfection of the whole social system, will inevitably, sooner or later, prove an obstacle to the onward march of improvement.

A corporation is not necessarily a grievance and a sore on the body politic. If it can have its full flourish, without let to the progress of society, it may be harmless or beneficent.

"*Sooner or later*;" be this condition marked, in estimating the spiritual policy of Rome. The body of reverends, which mediates between God and men, finds its best flourish, in just such degree of popular intelligence as suffices for comprehending the specious arguments, on which rest the claims of Holy Mother Church; and such amount of conscientiousness as galls the offender, till he has purchased absolution. More intelligence generally prevailing, and better appreciation of the divine law as a living rule of duty, would abate the awe in which the priesthood is held, and diminish the revenues accruing from mediating between offending man and his offended Maker. But Christianity found the world sunk below this moderate standard of intelligence and morals. The best flourish of the priesthood required in the people cultivation of understanding and conscience, up to the point of caring for their account in heaven's record. So the faulty relation between priesthood and people did not at once appear in the results; and, accordingly, the weight of the qualification, *sooner or later*.

But in the early growth of society, considerations like the above have been little attended to, compared with the obvious advantages

of the division of labor. As ordinarily each handicraft is best exercised by those earliest and steadiest in their devotion to the trade; so it is argued, universally, that the several departments of the public service will be best attended to, by being left to their respective trades, guilds, faculties, orders, or corporations, each strictly guarded from unhallowed intrusion. So religion has been left to its official functionaries, prescribing articles of belief and terms of salvation by a divine right,—legislation to princes and nobles, equally claiming by the same right to give law in temporals; and so of other general interests.

Now a movement has been slowly going on, through some centuries, for working society into conformity with a rational rule; a rule not overlooking the advantages of the division of labor, but taking in too such qualifying considerations as the healthful stimulus of free competition, watchfulness over public functionaries, and the necessity of harmonizing private and corporate interests, with public duty.

The movement has been slow; for the actors have dimly apprehended the part they were acting, and the principles by themselves vindicated. It has consisted of two principle acts. The Reformation carried republicanism into religion: our own Revolution into legislation. The two movements were parts of one whole; and, to get at the principles at bottom, either will serve for both, as well as for what may remain for finishing the work begun.

The Reformation having been conducted by theologians, it was natural that disproportionate importance should have been attached to theological niceties. So far as Luther was right in regarding the doctrine of justification by faith only as the great article at issue, it must have been, because the opposite doctrine favored the conceit of a mysterious mediating power vested in a priesthood—a conceit so favorable to the aggrandizement of the order thus distinguished. But considered as a *politic* movement—as an advance in rightly adjusting the social relations—the Reformation aimed principally at that ill arrangement, by which the authorized expounders of the law divine found their account, in involving that law in a glorious uncertainty, and entrapping people in a frequent violation thereof. Considered as a politic institution, Protestantism differs essentially

from Popery, in that it makes more of prevention than of remedy; gives the ministry its best flourish, in the best welfare of the whole body; and pays for spiritual health, rather than for spiritual sickness. If all Protestants do not consistently so, the fact accords with the dim understanding, on both sides, of the essential points contested.

This dim understanding further appears, in that after all the political discussion which has been, the success of republican institutions is still appealed to, as vindicating the reign of justice and benevolence in the public mind; mankind have within so much of the divine, are so self-disposed to do right, that they do not need much control, but may pretty safely be left to their own guidance. Nor is it left to the mere demagogue to talk thus.

Doubtful it may be, whether it should be called dimness of understanding, or rather perverse ingenuity, that men reason thus, when the facts are: So general is the disposition to abuse power, that wherever it is accumulated, it will surely be abused; accordingly it must be distributed as equally as possible. If government be made the business of one part of the community — one tenth, or one hundredth, or one thousandth — that part will inevitably exalt self, at the cost of the others. So strong is self-love, turned towards temporal interests, so acute to discern what tends to the one desired end, and so sure to bend every thing that way, that men's temporal interests are pretty safe in their own hands, and safe no where else. Now the legitimate end of civil government being, to secure the temporal welfare of *all, all* must have a share in it, or the excluded portions must find their rights neglected.

It may have favored the common mistake, that the leaders in successful republican movements have so often shown a heroic self-devotion and disinterestedness — men like Luther, and Washington. But these are the exceptions, the rare gems of humanity. If they were the fair specimens, their work would never have been needed. Then we might leave to a class the regulation, whether of our spirituals or temporals, with the like advantage, that we leave the making of our watches or our shoes to their respective trades. But the indistinct apprehension, why the advantages of the division of labor fail in the matter of government, accords well with the observation, that