

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

THE ORIGINAL INTENTION

It seems that there was an intention, when man began his quest for culture, that he should begin right. Indeed, it was not left to him to pick and choose his method of how he would provide for subsistence. Economic pressure from the first was the driving force that impelled him to take the right course. No matter what the difficulties were which lay in his path, the means for the adoption of method to overcome them were simple ones. He would never have risen from the mere animal stage of existence if he had not been endowed with singular gifts through the exercise of which he would ascend the scale of creation. These gifts were thought and foresight—the power to make provision for the morrow. And it was also an intention that he had to use to his advantage the faculties with which he was endowed or perish in the struggle for existence. There was nothing overlooked in the means which lay at his hand for the purposes of man-making and culture-building. There was nothing lacking in his physical and spiritual make-up for achieving the highest conceptions of the intention of creation. The purpose of it all was simple enough then. It is only when a culture begins to decline that sight of the purpose is lost. There may have been delays, accidents and diversions, halting now and then the progress of man; but all these must have

been in the nature of lessons which reminded him that he was not keeping his face towards the goal. There is more in the idea of Greek perfectionism than usually meets the eye of the student and, as I regard the mission of man, I am convinced that he came into the world to make his life perfect. It may be said that that was the ideal of creation.

How far we have fallen short of that achievement concerns only the deep thinkers of a civilization. Yet, it ought to be clear to those who have had any training in spiritual disciplines that the aim of all religions, with the exception, perhaps, of Buddhism, is one of perfecting the life of the individual. No one doubts the beneficent objects of creation, for those who can see and think must realize, when they look about the earth, that its resources must have been laid out with a view to making man happy. Widespread in every direction are the resources which beckon man's labor and, when it is applied, will yield all useful things for his nourishment and well-being. Therefore, it seems to have been a law at the very inception of the quest for happiness that the start should be made right. No matter how we ponder the questions of purpose, ultimate goal, whether from a purely religious or a secular philosophical point of view, we can find no other than a beneficent one.

THE GIFT OF THE EARTH

That the earth is only a speck in the universe alters in no way the fact of the human purpose, nor does the speedily-receding age of the earth, as it is estimated by the geologist, alter the fact that so far as we know, man received the earth into his possession as a gift. The earth is his to use. It might be said that the earth also belongs to the animals in the same sense. That is true,

for the animal can no more live without land than man can. Yet, there is this singular difference between man and the animal: man is endowed with faculties which enable him to be lord of the beast. And surely this portends all the more to substantiate the claim that the earth is his to use, as it is of every creature that moves upon it.

The anthropologist has taken the history of man back some half million years. Recent discoveries of fossils tell us that man is an old resident, but if discoveries of the future were to establish geologically and anthropologically the fact that he has been here for a million years, it would in no way alter the economic intention that the earth, and all that he could produce from it, was his to enjoy. No one so far has conceived an idea that there was at any time a rival to his claim, nor have any of the writers of lively imagination, who would tear the veil of the future and take a peep at the beyond, contrived to put before us a successor to man. Man is as far as human imagination can go. No matter what may be taking place on other habitable planets, the fact remains that man is here to stay, so long as the productible earth endures.

The earth itself is not only the storehouse of every need of man, it is also the storehouse of everything that can do him harm. There is poison in plant and poison in reptile. For him there is destruction in flood, drought and wind; lightning and fire are dangers which threaten him and his handiwork. Then there are many natural disturbances which may menace his life, such as tidal waves and earthquakes. But experience, which was essential, taught him what was to be avoided and why he should seek shelter from the elements, and discover regions where he might live in security.

MAN AT THE CROSSROADS

MAN'S PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

No one will deny the postulate that man alone was responsible for the care of his body, for in every civilization we find extraordinary evidence of the thought that he expended upon his physical well-being. All the services that he devised which minister to his sanitary requirements are so perfect that archaeologists are amazed at the manifold aids he contrived for this purpose. Articles of the toilet discovered in Egypt differ not in principle from those which we use today. In the Museum in Cairo, manicure sets can be seen, which indicate clearly the respect given to parts of the body. The bath is an ancient institution, and the comb dates from a very early period. The rubbing stone, too, is a very old toilet article. It may be said that the desire for bodily cleanliness, as indicated in such tools recovered from the debris of old civilizations, was affected by only a small section of society, and that was the rich and leisured class. Nevertheless, these articles must have been fashioned by the working people and, having the example set before them of the thought the rich gave to their bodies, they, no doubt, accepted the precept and made similar articles for their own use. Men and women *then* must have been something like men and women *now*. The shop-girl of our day tends to her body with something of the care a person of higher rank gives to hers. Whether the people of lowly position expended the same care on their bodies or not, the fact remains that the aids to cleanliness are by no means so modern as some sociologists would maintain.

DISEASE AND EVIL

Such thoughts lead us on to consider the question of how disease came to manifest itself as an evil which

sorely afflicted the race. Many ancient and modern philosophers, looking from *now to then*, instead of from *then to now*, have attributed the evil of disease to the Creator. Suppose for the moment we accept the position of those who contend that the principles of Good and Evil as co-ordinate powers were from the beginning, and that disease and other physical and mental evils were in man from the first. Then by what miracle did man survive, and how can it be explained that man himself shows clearly today that he has the power to overcome disease and is now busily engaged, in different parts of the earth, in not only eradicating many diseases, but at the same time wiping out the plague spots of the world? From Peiping to London, from Montreal to Buenos Aires, bacteriologists are at work, proving every day that it is possible for man to guard against disease and maintain a sound mind in a sound body. Indeed, the spread of hygienic methods for counteracting disease reminds us how narrow is the span that separates us from the physical gospel of the Greeks. It is only necessary to mention the development in athletics, and the international interest that is now taken in the Olympic Games, to show what man is doing to regain his physical powers of resistance.

To me it is plain from what man is now doing with regard to this problem of disease that he began his sojourn on earth physically fit, and endowed with unique powers of physical resistance. It is impossible to imagine how he could have survived, had it been otherwise. We know why certain creatures disappeared from the earth. The altered conditions of terrain, climate, and food supply, account largely for their disappearance. But man surmounted not only all these difficulties; he also overcame the innumerable vicissitudes

which beset him in pillage, slavery, and war. The point is: man is here, and man is proving slowly but surely that he can conquer disease.

Let us, therefore, use our imaginations and examine two reasons how and why the evils of disease afflicted him. The first that comes to my mind is slavery, the subjugation of pastoralists by hunters, goaded by hunger. The oldest records we have of people clearly indicate the beginnings of slavery. The first appeal in the *Gathas*, in the *Zend Avesta*, is typical:

“On me comes the assault of wrath and of violent power, the blow of desolation, audacious insolence, and (thievish) might. None other pasture-giver have I than you, therefore do ye teach me good (tillage) for the fields (my only hope of welfare)!”

SLAVERY

This is the cry for help, against the subjugating host, we meet in the earliest literature of the Chinese, the Egyptians, the Greeks, and the Romans. Indian and Persian literature abound in such figures. Years ago I read a short essay (I forget now what it was called, also the name of the author), which set out to describe what happened to a pastoral community when hunters were forced by hunger to attack it. The author had a theory that man's mission was primarily an agricultural one, and that the hunter represented the evil forces in men who desired to live without the labor of tillage. Once the hunter had subjugated an agricultural community, he became the ruler of it, and the people became his slaves. Helotry began in this way. The conditions imposed upon the slave were such that a complete change took place in the routine of his life: first, he ceased to

be a free agent; second, he was robbed of all ambition. His women were the victims of the desires of the conquerors. Whatever refinements (if such a word can be used here without being misunderstood) he had cultivated were blighted by discouragement, and checked by the hard conditions of his labor. Diodorus Siculus, describing the conditions of the slave in the gold mines of Egypt, says that they "had no time to look after their own bodies." Therefore, it is easy to imagine that the habit of cleanliness, no matter how primitive it was, was soon lost, and he sank deeper and deeper into the mire of uncleanness. Soon disease attacked him in two ways: from his women who would be used promiscuously by the conquerors; and again, from the degradation of the conditions under which he labored. It has been suggested by an investigator of the conditions of slavery that in the early times of helotry, the twin brethren of incipient disease, discouragement and lack of rest, created a fertile field for its ravages. Whether this be so or not, there is one thing certain in this inquiry: slavery was responsible for checking man's desire for cleanliness and battering down the gates of his resistance. In attempting a slight survey of this problem, we can do no more than use our imaginations, based upon the ancient records of peoples.

It is not without profit that we turn to the quality of mind which produced the following statement:

"I know not that we have any one kind or degree of enjoyment, but by the means of our own actions. And by prudence and care we may, for the most part, pass our days in tolerable ease and quiet; or, on the contrary, we may, by rashness, ungoverned passion, wilfulness, or even by negligence, make ourselves as miserable as ever we please. And many do please to make themselves

extremely miserable—i.e., do what they know beforehand will render them so.”

Joseph Butler, the author of *The Analogy of Religion*, may be read to advantage by the sceptics of our generation. No one has put before us so simple and yet so profound a statement of man's responsibility for the evils which beset him. He says:

“Now, in the present state, all which we enjoy, and a great part of what we suffer, is put in our own power. For pleasure and pain are the consequences of our actions; and we are endued by the author of our nature with capacities of foreseeing these consequences.”

Evil is the consequence of man's own folly. If he hath the power, through the development of scientific method, to war upon disease and conquer it, he hath the power, also, to conquer the problems of ignorance and poverty; but in order to succeed in doing this, he must treat fundamental economics as a science, and master the political difficulties of his own creation.