

Chapter 44

Conclusion: The Individual Life

MY TASK IS DONE. Yet behind the problems of social life lies the problem of individual life. This thought brought me cheer while writing this book, and it may be of cheer to those who, in their heart of hearts, take up the struggle.

The truth I have tried to show will not find easy acceptance. If that were possible, it would have been accepted long ago, and never obscured. But it will find friends who will suffer and toil for it; and if need be, die for it. This is the power of truth. Ultimately, it will prevail. But in our own times or even when any memory of us remains, who shall say?

Want and misery, ignorance and brutality are caused by unjust social institutions. Those who try to right them find bitterness and disappointment. So it has been in the past; so is it now. The most bitter thought is that the effort is hopeless, the sacrifice futile. This fear sometimes comes to even the best and bravest. How few of those who sow the seed will see it grow.

The standard of truth and justice has been raised many times. Over and over, it has been trampled down, often in blood. If the forces opposed to truth were weak, why would error so long prevail?

But for those who see the truth and would follow it, success is not the only thing. Lies and injustice often

provide that! Must not truth and justice have something to give that is their own, by proper right?

When I set out on this inquiry, I had no theory to support, no conclusions to prove. Simply seeing the squalor and misery of a great city appalled and tormented me so that it would not let me rest. I constantly wondered what caused it and how it could be cured. Out of this, something came to me that I did not expect to find; a faith that was dead has been revived.

If we analyze the ideas that have destroyed the hope of an afterlife, we shall not find their source in physical science. Rather, they stem from certain teachings of political and social science that have permeated thought in all directions. These have their root in three doctrines: First, that population is larger than we can provide for. Second, that poverty, vice, and misery are the result of natural laws—and are actually the means by which civilization advances. Third, that human progress occurs through slow genetic changes.

These doctrines, which have generally been accepted as truth, reduce the individual to insignificance. They destroy the idea that there can be any regard for individual existence in the ordering of the universe. Or that there can be any recognition of what we would call moral qualities.

It is difficult to reconcile the concept of human immortality with the idea that nature constantly wastes people by bringing them into being where there is no room for them. It is impossible to reconcile the idea of an intelligent and beneficent Creator with the belief that wretchedness and degradation, which are the lot of such a large proportion of humankind, result from divine decrees. Finally, the idea

that the human species is the result of slow modifications perpetuated by heredity irresistibly suggests the idea that the object of human existence is the life of the species, not the individual.

Our investigation has shown that these doctrines are false. Population does not tend to outrun subsistence. Poverty and human suffering do not spring from natural laws; they come from the ignorance and selfishness of people. Human progress does not come from changes in the nature of mankind. On the contrary, human nature, generally speaking, has always been the same.

Political economy has been called the dismal science. As currently taught, it is indeed hopeless and despairing. Yet, in its proper symmetry, political economy is radiant with hope.

When understood correctly, the laws governing the production and distribution of wealth demonstrate that poverty and injustice are not inevitable. On the contrary, a social state is possible in which poverty would be unknown. Then, the higher qualities of human nature would have an opportunity for full development.

Social development is not governed by divine providence nor merciless fate, but by natural law. Human will is the great determining factor. In the aggregate, the human condition is what we make of it. Economic law and moral law are essentially the same. The intellect grasps this truth after toilsome effort—but the moral sense reaches it quickly by intuition.

Science shows us the universality of law. The same law operates in the smallest divisions and in the immeasurable distances of space. An astronomer follows a moving body until it disappears from the range of the telescope. But

this is merely the visible part of its orbit. Beyond sight, the law still holds. Centuries later, the astronomer's calculations are proven correct.

If we trace the laws that govern life in human society, we find they are the same in the largest community as in the smallest. We find that what seem to be, at first sight, divergences and exceptions are merely manifestations of the same principles. And we find that everywhere we can trace it, social law runs into and conforms with moral law. In the life of a community, justice infallibly brings its reward, injustice its punishment. But we cannot see this in individual life.

Human progress is not the improvement of human nature. The advances of civilization are not accumulated in the constitution of individuals, but in the constitution of society. They are not fixed and permanent, but may be lost at any time.

What then is the meaning of life inevitably bounded by death? To me, it seems intelligible only as an avenue to another life. Its facts can be explained only by a theory that must be expressed in myth and symbol. The Prince of Light still battles the Powers of Darkness.

To anyone who will hear it, the clarions of battle call. Strong souls and high endeavor, the world needs them now. Though truth and right seem often overwhelmed, we may not see it all. Shall we say that what passes from our sight passes into oblivion? Even animals have senses we do not. Far, far beyond our grasp, eternal laws must hold their sway.