

PART I — THE MEANING OF POLITICAL ECONOMY

CHAPTER I — MAN AND THE WORLD

In the world — I use the term in its philosophic sense of the aggregate or system of things of which we are cognizant and of which we ourselves are part — we are enabled by analysis to distinguish three elements or factors: 1) That which feels, perceives, thinks, wills; which to distinguish, we call mind or soul or spirit. 2) That which has mass or weight, and extension or form; which to distinguish, we call matter. 3) That which acting on matter produces movement; which to distinguish, we call motion or force or energy.

We cannot, in truth, directly recognize energy apart from matter; nor matter without some manifestation of energy; nor mind or spirit unjoined with matter and motion. For consciousness itself begins with us only after bodily life has already begun, and memory by which alone we can recall past consciousness is later still in appearing. It may be that what we call matter is but a form of energy; and it may perhaps be that what we call energy is but a manifestation of what we call mind or soul or spirit; and some have even held that from matter and its inherent powers all else originates. Yet though it may be that at bottom they are one, we are compelled in thought to distinguish these three as independent, separable elements. Of these from our standpoint, that which feels, perceives, thinks, wills, comes first in order of priority, for it is this which is first in our own consciousness, and it is only through this that we have consciousness of any other existence. In this, as our own consciousness testifies, is the initiative of all our own motions and

movements, so far as consciousness and memory shed light.

We awake to consciousness to find ourselves, clothed in flesh, and in company with other like beings, resting on what seems to us a plane surface. Above us, when the clouds do not conceal them, the sun shines by day and the moon and stars by night. Of what this place is, and our relations to it, we could individually know little more than is presented to us in direct consciousness, little more in fact than the animals know. But the observations and reflections of many succeeding men, garnered and systematized, enable us to know things to which the senses untaught by reason are blind.

By the light of this gathered knowledge we behold ourselves on the surface of a globe seemingly fixed, but really in constant motion of many different kinds — a globe large to us, yet only as a grain of sand on the seashore compared with the bodies and spaces of the universe of which it is a part. We find ourselves on the surface of this ceaselessly moving globe, as passengers, brought there in utter insensibility, they do not how or whence, might find themselves on the deck of ship, moving they know not where, and who see in the distance similar ships, whether tenanted or how tenanted they can only guess. The immeasurably great lies beyond us, and about and beneath us the immeasurably small. The microscope reveals infinitudes no less startling to our minds than does the telescope.

Here we are, depth upon depth about us, confined to the bottom of that sea of air which envelops the surface of this moving globe. In it we live and breathe and are constantly immersed. Were our lungs to cease taking in and pumping out this air, or our bodies relieved of its pressure, we should die.

Small as our globe seems in the light of astronomy, it is not really of the whole globe that we are tenants, but only a part of its surface. In round numbers the globe is 8000 miles in diameter. Thus the skin of the thinnest-skinned apple gives no idea of the

relative thinness of the zone of perpendicular distance to which man is confined. And three-fourths of the surface of the globe is covered by water, on which, though man may pass, he cannot dwell; and considerable parts of what remain are made inaccessible by ice. Like a bridge of hair is the line of temperature that we must keep. Investigators tell us of the existence of temperatures of thousands of degrees above zero and thousands of degrees below zero. But man's body must maintain the constant level of a fraction over 98 degrees above zero. A rise or fall of seven degrees either way from this level will kill him. With the permanent rise or fall of a few more degrees in the mean temperature of the surface of the globe it would become uninhabitable by us.

And while all about us, even what seems firmest, is in constant change and motion, so is it with ourselves. These bodies of ours are in reality like the flame of the gas-burner, which has continuous and defined form, but only as a manifestation of changes in the stream of succeeding particles, and which disappears the moment that stream is cut off. What there is real and distinctive in us is that to which we may give a name but cannot explain or easily define — that which gives to changing matter and passing motion the face and form of man.

In all this, man resembles the other animals that with him tenant the superficies of the same earth. Physically he is merely such an animal. Were man only an animal he would be but an inferior animal. Had he no power of providing himself with artificial clothing, man could not exist in many of the regions he now inhabits. He could live only in the most genial and equable parts of the globe.

But man is more than an animal. Though in physical equipment he may in nothing surpass, and in some things fall below other animals, in mental equipment he is so vastly superior as to

take him out of their class, and to make him the lord and master of them all. And what more clearly perhaps indicates the deep gulf which separates him from all other animals is that he alone out of all animals is the producer, or bringer forth, and is in that sense the maker. This is a difference which renders the distinction between the highest animal and the lowest man one not of degree but of kind, and which, linked with the animals though he be, justifies the declaration of Scripture that man is created in the likeness of the All-Maker. We know of no race of man so low that they do not raise fruits or vegetables, or domesticate and breed animals; that do not cook foods; that do not fashion weapons; that do not construct habitations; that do not make for themselves garments; that do not adorn themselves or their belongings with ornamentation; that do not draw, paint, sculpt or make music. No animal save man ever kindled a fire or cooked a meal, or made a tool or fashioned a weapon.

It is true that squirrels hide nuts; that birds build nests; that beavers dam streams; that bees construct homes, in which they store the honeyed extract from flowers. But in all this there is nothing akin to the faculties which in these things man displays. What man does, he does by taking thought, by consciously adjusting means to ends. He does it by adapting and contriving and experimenting and copying; by effort after effort and trial after trial

Nature provides for all living things beneath man by implanting in them blind strong impulses which at proper times and seasons prompt them to do what it is necessary they should do. But to man she grants only such impellings of instinct as that which prompts the mother to press the newborn baby to her breast and the baby to suckle. With exceptions such as these, she withdraws from man her guiding power and leaves him to himself. For in him a higher power has arisen and looks out on the world — the power of producing, of

making, of causing things to be; a power that seeks to look back into the past ere the globe was, and to peer into a future when it will cease to exist; a power that looks on nature's show with curiosity like that with which an apprentice might scan the master's work, and will ask why tides run and winds blow, and how suns and stars have been put together.

Endowed with reason, and then deprived, or all but deprived, of instinct, man differs from other animals in being the producer. Like them, for instance, he requires food. But while the animals get their food by taking what they find, and are thus limited by what they find already in existence, man has a power of getting his food by bringing it into existence. And so it is with the fulfillment of all his wants; the satisfaction of all his desires. By the use of his animal powers, man can cover perhaps as much ground in a day as can a horse or a dog; he can cross perhaps about as wide a stream. But by virtue of the power that makes him the producer he is already spanning continents and oceans with a speed, a certainty and an ease that not even the birds of most powerful wing can rival.

As this power, which we call reason, rises in man, nature withdraws the light of instinct and leaves him to his own devices — to rise or fall, to soar above the brute or to sink lower. For as the Hebrew Scriptures have phrased it, his eyes are opened and before him are good and evil. The ability to fall, no less than the ability to rise — the very failures and mistakes and perversities of man — show his place and powers. There is among the brutes no drunkenness, no unnatural vice, no waste of effort in accomplishing injurious results, no wanton slaughter of their own kind, no want amid plenty.