

### Kropotkin's "Mutual Aid."\*

**E**NRICO FERRI has pointed out in his work on "Socialism and Modern Science," how frequently the defenders of the present order have attempted to bolster up their position by arguments drawn from the field of evolutionary philosophy. They have mainly rested on the doctrine of the "struggle for survival." Kropotkin shows that there is an wholly other side to this question of no less importance. The principle of mutual aid or association for mutual protection and aggression is shown to be no less fundamental. It is pointed out that this fact was not overlooked by Darwin, but that his followers have laid all the emphasis upon the evolutionistic side of his doctrine.

Kropotkin shows how this principle runs through the whole biological world. He traces its foundations among the savages and barbarians in the cities of the Middle Ages and finally its manifestation in present society. He tells us that "Mutual aid is met with even amidst the lowest animals, and we must be prepared to learn some day from the students of microscopical pond-life, facts of unconscious mutual support, even from the life of micro-organisms." In locusts, beetles, land crabs and ants, he finds numerous instances of association for mutual assistance. But it is when he comes to the birds that the principle really begins to reach almost a dominating position. It enters throughout the whole life of birds, but in the time of migration even varying species gather. "All wait for their tardy congeners, and finally they start in a certain well-known direction—a fruit of accumulated collective experience—the strongest flying at the head of the band, and relieving one another in that difficult task. . . . Going now to mammals, the first thing which strikes us is the overwhelming numerical predominance of social species over those few carnivores which do not associate. "The cat tribe is offered as almost the only one which "decidedly prefer isolation to society, and are but seldom met with, even in small groups."

The last remnants of Malthusianism are swept aside, as he shows that practically nowhere in the world does animal life come anywhere near the limit of the resources available for subsistence.

"It is hardly necessary to say that those mammals which stand at the very top of the animal world, and most approach man by their structure and intelligence, are eminently sociable. . . . In the monkey and ape tribe from the smallest species to the biggest ones sociability is a rule to which we know but few exceptions." The intimate dependence of this associative principle upon the

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evolution of the individual and the maintenance of life is continuously pointed out—"That life in societies is the most powerful weapon in the struggle for life, taken in its widest sense . . . could be illustrated by any amount of evidence. . . . Life in societies enables the feeblest insects, the feeblest birds, and the feeblest mammals to resist, or to protect themselves from, the most terrible birds and beasts of prey; it permits longevity; it enables the species to rear its progeny with the least waste of energy and to maintain its numbers albeit a very slow birth-rate; it enables the gregarious animals to migrate in search of new abodes. Therefore, while fully admitting that force, swiftness, protective colors, cunningness and endurance to hunger and cold, which are mentioned by Darwin and Wallace, are so many qualities making the individual, or the species, the fittest under certain circumstances, we maintain that under any circumstances sociability is the greatest advantage in the struggle for life. Those species which willingly or unwillingly abandon it are doomed to decay; while those animals which know best how to combine, have the greatest chances of survival and of further evolution, although they may be inferior to others in each of the faculties enumerated by Darwin and Wallace, save the intellectual faculty. The highest vertebrates, and especially mankind, are the best proof of this assertion. As to the intellectual faculty, while every Darwinist will agree with Darwin that it is the most powerful arm in the struggle for life, and the most powerful factor of further evolution, he also will insist that intelligence is an eminently social faculty. Language, imitation and accumulated experience are so many elements of growing intelligence of which the unsociable animal is deprived."

However, he does not by any means entirely overlook the importance of the idea of struggle: "No naturalist will doubt that the idea of a struggle for life carried on through organic nature is the greatest generalization of our century. Life is struggle; and in the struggle the fittest survive. But the answers to the questions "by which arms is this struggle chiefly carried on?" and "Who are the fittest in the struggle?" will widely differ according to the importance given to the two different aspects of the struggle; the direct one for food and safety among separate individuals, and the struggle which Darwin described as 'metaphorical'—the struggle, very often collective, against adverse circumstances."

"Don't compete! competition is always injurious to the species, and you have plenty of resources to avoid it! That is the tendency of nature, not always realized in full, but always present. That is the watchword which comes to us from the bush, the forest, the river, the ocean. 'Therefore combine—practice mutual aid.' That is the surest means for giving to each and to all the greatest

safety, the best guarantee of existence and progress, bodily, intellectual, and moral. That is what Nature teaches us; and that is what all those animals which have attained the highest position in their respective classes have done. That is also what man—the most primitive man—has been doing; and that is why man has reached the position upon which we now stand, as we shall see in the subsequent chapters devoted to mutual aid in human societies.”

He next proceeds to review man, and points out that “Darwin so well understood that isolately-living apes never could have developed into man-like beings, that he was inclined to consider man as descended from some comparatively weak but social species, like the chimpanzee, rather than from some stronger but unsociable species, like the gorilla.”

In his study of savagery he does not idealize but he does recognize that “the primitive man has one quality, elaborated and maintained by the very necessities of his hard struggle for life—he identifies his own existence with that of his tribe; and without that quality mankind never would have attained the level it has attained now.”

Even throughout barbarism this effect of mutual aid continued to develop and in the later stages of barbarism came together in the village community in which the principle of association began to be territorial rather than consanguineous: “The conception of a common territory, appropriated or protected by common efforts, was elaborated, and it took the place of the vanishing conceptions of common descent. The common goods gradually lost their character of ancestors and were endowed with a local territorial character. They became the gods or saints of a given locality; ‘the land’ was identified with its inhabitants. Territorial unions grew up instead of the consanguine unions of old, and this new organization evidently offered many advantages under the given circumstances. It recognized the independence of the family and even emphasized it, the village community disclaiming all rights of interference in what was going on within the family enclosure; it gave much more freedom to personal initiative; it was not hostile in principle to men of different descent, and it maintained at the same time the necessary cohesion of action and thought, while it was strong enough to oppose the dominative tendencies of the minorities of wizards, priests, and professional or distinguished warriors. Consequently it became the primary cell of future organization, and with many nations the village community has retained this character until now.” In this stage the idea of private property with its separative force has begun to appear, but by no means to become dominant.

He next takes up the associations of the Middle Ages. Here

he is on more familiar ground, as the Socialist writers have long pointed out the remarkable associative character of this historical stage. The mediaeval city, while having many points of difference, had a remarkably common type: "It was an attempt at organizing, on a much grander scale than in a village community, a close union for mutual aid and support, for consumption and production, and for social life altogether, without imposing upon men the fetters of the State, but giving full liberty of expression to the creative genius of each separate group of individuals in art, crafts, science, commerce, and political organization."

He grows enthusiastic over the work and labor conditions of the guild: "We are laughed at when we say that work must be pleasant, but—'every one must be pleased with his work,' a mediaeval Kuttenberg ordinance says, 'and no one shall, while doing nothing, appropriate for himself what others have produced by application and work, because laws must be a shield for application and work.' And amidst all present talk about an eight hours' day, it may be well to remember an ordinance of Ferdinand the First relative to the Imperial coal mines, which settled the miner's day at eight hours, 'as it used to be of old,' and work on Saturday afternoon was prohibited. Longer hours were very rare, we are told by Janssen, while shorter hours were of common occurrence. In this country, in the fifteenth century, Rogers says, 'the workmen worked only forty-eight hours a week.' The Saturday half-holiday, too, which we consider as a modern conquest, was in reality an old mediaeval institution; it was bathing time for a great part of the community, while Wednesday afternoon was bathing time for the *Geselle*. And although school meals did not exist—probably because no children went hungry to school—a distribution of bath-money to the children whose parents found difficulty in providing it was habitual in several places. As to Labor Congresses they also were a regular feature of the Middle Ages. In some parts of Germany craftsmen of the same trade, belonging to different communes, used to come together every year to discuss questions relative to their trade, the years of apprenticeship, the wandering years, the wages, and so on; and in 1572 the Hanseatic towns formally recognized the right of the crafts to come together at periodical congresses, and to take any resolutions, so long as they were not contrary to the cities' rolls, relative to the quality of goods. Such Labor Congresses, partly international like the *Hansa* itself, are known to have been held by bakers, founders, smiths, tanners, sword-makers and cask-makers."

There were federations of the cities themselves for mutual action, as has been frequently pointed out. To those who still look upon mediaeval times as the "Dark Ages," the following quotation on the accomplishments of that age will come somewhat as a sur-

prise. "The results of that new move which mankind made in the mediaeval city were immense. At the beginning of the eleventh century the houses of Europe were small clusters of miserable huts, adorned with but low, clumsy churches, the builders of which hardly knew how to make an arch; the arts, mostly consisting of some weaving and forging, were in their infancy; learning was found in but few monasteries. Three hundred and fifty years later, the very face of Europe had been changed. The land was dotted with rich cities, surrounded by immense thick walls which were embellished by towers and gates, each of them a work of art in itself. The cathedrals, conceived in a grand style, and profusely decorated, lifted their bell-towers to the skies, displaying a purity of form and a boldness of imagination which we now vainly strive to attain. The crafts and arts had risen to a degree of perfection which we can hardly boast of having superseded in many directions, if the inventive skill of the worker and the superior finish of his work be appreciated higher than rapidity of fabrication. The navies of the free cities furrowed in all directions the Northern and the Southern Mediterranean; one effort more and they would cross the oceans. Over large tracts of land well being had taken the place of misery; learning had grown and spread. The methods of science had been elaborated; the basis of natural philosophy had been laid down; and the way had been paved for all the mechanical inventions of which our own times are so proud. Such were the magic changes accomplished in Europe in less than four hundred years. And the losses which Europe sustained through the loss of its free cities can only be understood when we compare the seventeenth century with the fourteenth or the thirteenth. The prosperity which formerly characterized Scotland, Germany, the plains of Italy, was gone. The roads had fallen into an abject state, the cities were depopulated, labor was brought into slavery, art had vanished, commerce itself was delaying."

When he comes to treat "Mutual Rid Amongst Ourselves," he is somewhat less satisfactory. Here his almost ridiculous "Statophobia" makes him look with horror upon association which is in any way connected with political forms. He seems utterly unable to see that the mediaeval city which he admired so much was a much more authoritative organization at many points than even the modern state, although to be sure in its most perfect form it approximated to the ideal of the future society upheld by Socialists, in that it was an administration of things. Kropotkin points this out when treating of the mediaeval city, but seems incapable of realizing that the present disorder is laying the form for a future association which shall be as much larger and better than that of the mediaeval city as the world market is larger than the city.

In his explanation of the causes of social evolution and the rise and fall of institutions, he is particularly weak. It is quite manifest that he is pursued by the ghost of economic determinism and fears lest he should yield to it in the least, so he accounts for the downfall of the mediaeval city by the fact that for two or three hundred years it was "taught from the pulpit, the university chair, and the judges' bench, that salvation must be sought for in a strongly-centralized state, placed under a semi-divine authority." Scientist though he is, it never appears to enter his head that this phenomena must have had a cause and did not arise from the "natural depravity" of its teachers. He has one rather striking illustration, however, in his discussion of "Mutual Aid Amongst Ourselves," which will be appreciated by every Socialist writer: "Every Socialist newspaper—and there are hundreds of them in Europe alone—has the same history of years of sacrifice without any hope of reward, and in the overwhelming majority of cases, even without any personal ambition.

"Every quire of a penny paper sold, every meeting, every hundred votes which are won at a Socialist election, represent an amount of energy and sacrifices of which no outsider has the faintest idea. And what is now done by Socialists has been done in every popular and advanced party, political and religious, in the past. All past progress has been promoted by like men and by a like devotion."

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