

WHERE MUST LASTING PROGRESS BEGIN ?

BY ELIZABETH CADY STANTON.

To the calm observer there is nothing more impressive in society to-day than the varied and multitudinous associations for the amelioration of human poverty, ignorance, and crime; and nothing more depressing than the seeming immense waste of force scattered in these innumerable directions with results so intangible and undefined. From all the discussions we hear in the halls of legislation, and on the popular platform, on the relations of capital and labor, finance, free trade, land monopoly, taxation, individualism, and socialism, the rights of women, children, criminals, and animals, one would think that an entire change must speedily be effected in our theories of government, religion, and social life, and so there would be if a small minority, even, honestly believed in these specific reforms. But alas! our reading minds are yet to be educated into the first principles of social science; they are yet to learn that our present theories of life are all false. The old ideas of caste and class, of rich and poor, educated and uneducated, must pass away, and the many must no longer suffer that the few may shine. Our religion must teach the brotherhood of the race, the essential oneness of humanity, and our government must be based on the broad principles of equal rights to all. A religion that seeks to make the people satisfied in their degraded conditions, and releases them from all responsibility for its continuance, is unworthy our intelligent belief, and a government that holds half its people in slavery, practically chained where they are born, in ignorance, poverty, and vice, is unworthy our intelligent support.

The object of all our specific reforms is to secure equal conditions for the whole human race. The initiative steps to this end are:—

1. Educate our upper classes, our most intelligent people, into the belief that our present civilization is based on false

principles, and that the ignorance, poverty, and crime we see about us are the legitimate results of our false theories.

2. They must be educated to believe that our present conditions and environments can and will be changed, and that as man is responsible for the miseries of the race, through his own knowledge and wisdom the change must come. To-day, men make their God responsible for all human arrangements, and they quote Scripture to prove that poverty is one of His wise provisions for the development of all the cardinal virtues. I heard a sermon preached, not long ago, from the text: "The poor ye have always with you," in which the preacher dwelt on the virtues of benevolence and gratitude called out on either side. Poverty, said he, has been the wise schoolmaster, to teach the people industry, economy, self-sacrifice, patience, and humility, all those beautiful virtues that best fit the human soul for the life hereafter. "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Thus the lessons of submission and content have been sedulously taught to oppressed classes, in the name of God, with fair promises of heaven to come.

The rich must be taught that they have no right to live in luxury while others starve. The poor must be taught that they, too, have inalienable rights on this green earth, the right to life, liberty, and happiness, and to the fruits of their own industry, and it is the imperative duty of each class to concede the one and demand the other. The apathy and indifference of the masses in their degraded conditions are as culpable as the pride and satisfaction of the upper classes in their superior position.

As the only hope for the lasting progress of the race and a radical reform in social life lie in the right education of children, their birth and development is the vital starting-point for the philosopher. A survey of the various unfortunate classes of society that have hitherto occupied the time and thought of different orders of philanthropists, and the little that has been accomplished in our own lifetime, to go no farther back, gives very little encouragement for this mere surface work that occupies so many noble men and women in each generation. In spite of all our asylums and charities, religious discussion and legislation, the problems of pauperism, intemperance, and crime are no

nearer a satisfactory solution than when our pilgrim fathers landed on Plymouth Rock, in search of that liberty in thought and action denied in the old world. The gloomy panorama of misery and crime moves on, a dark picture in this young civilization.

If we would use the same common sense in the improvement of mankind that we do in the ordinary affairs of life, we should begin our work at the foundations of society, in family life, in parenthood, the source and centre of all these terrible evils whose branches we are trying to lop off. A family living in an old house, on unhealthy ground, with water in the cellar, a crumbling foundation, the beams like sponge, the roof leaking, the chimney full of cracks, would not spend large sums of money year after year, generation after generation, in patching up the old house on the same old spot, but with ordinary wisdom and economy, they would build anew, on higher ground, with strong foundations, sound timber, substantial chimneys, and solid roofing. True, they would patch up the old at as little cost as possible, merely to afford them a shelter until the new home was built. And all our special reform work to-day is but patching the old, until with a knowledge of the true laws of social science we can begin to build the new aright. There is much surface work we must do in reform, for decency's sake, but all this patching up of ignorant, diseased, criminal, unfortunate humanity is temporary and transient, effecting no radical improvement anywhere. The real work that will tell on all time and the eternities, is building the new life and character, laying the foundation-stones of future generations in justice, liberty, purity, peace, and love, the work of the rising generation of fathers and mothers at this hour. Those of us who have long since passed the meridian of life, can give you the result of our experience and researches into social science, but with the young men and women of this hour rests the hope of the higher civilization which it is possible for the race to attain through obedience to law. The lovers of science come back to us from every latitude and longitude, from their explorations in the mineral, vegetable, and animal kingdoms, from their observations of the planetary world, bearing the same message. "All things are governed by law," while man himself who holds in his own hand the key to all knowledge

and power seems never to be in unison with the grandeur and glory of the world in which he lives. The picture of struggling humanity through the long past is not a cheerful one to contemplate. What can be done to mitigate the miseries of the masses? This thought rests heavily and with increasing weight on the hearts of all who love justice, liberty, and equality. The same law of inheritance that hands down the vices of ancestors, hands down their virtues also, and in a greater ratio, for good is positive, active, ever vigilant, its worshippers swim up stream against the current. Could we make all men and women feel their individual responsibility in the chain of influences that tell on all time, we could solemnize in our own day such vows for nobler lives as to make this seeming herculean work light as the wings of angels. If, henceforward, all the thought, the money, the religious enthusiasm dedicated to the regeneration of the race, could be devoted to the generation of our descendants, to the conditions and environments of parents and children, the whole face of society might be changed before we celebrate the next centennial of our national life. Science has vindicated our right to discuss freely whether our ancestors were apes; let it be as free to ask whether our posterity shall be idiots, dwarfs, and knaves, and if not, by what change, if any, in our social institutions, such wretched results may be avoided. Gatton in his work on "Heredity," says our present civilization is growing too complicated for our best minds even to grasp, and to meet successfully the issues of the hour, humanity must be lifted up a few degrees, as speedily as possible. And where must this radical work begin? The best hope for the progress of the race in political, religious, and social life lies in the right birth, education, and development of our children. Here is the true starting-point for the philosopher.

Let the young man who is indulging in all manner of excesses remember that in considering the effect of the various forms of dissipation on himself, his own happiness or danger, he does not begin to measure the evil of his life. As the high priest at the family altar, his deeds of darkness will inflict untold suffering on generation after generation. One of the most difficult lessons to impress on any mind is the power and extent of individual influence; and parents above all others resist the belief that their children are

exactly what they make them, no more, no less; like produces like. The origin of ideas was long a disputed point with different schools of philosophers. Locke took the ground that the mind of every child born into the world is like a piece of blank paper; that you may write thereon whatever you will, but science has long since proved that such idealists as Descartes were nearer right, that the human family come into the world with ideas, with marked individual proclivities; that the pre-natal conditions have more influence than all the education that comes after. If family peculiarities are transmitted to the third and fourth generation, the grandson clothed with the same gait, gesture, mode of thought and expression as the grandfather he has never seen, it is evident that each individual may reap some advantage and development from those predecessors whose lives in all matters great and small are governed by law, by a conscientious sense of duty, not by feeling, chance, or appetite.

If there is a class of educators who need special preparation for their high and holy duties, it is those who assume the responsibilities of parents. Shall they give less thought to immortal beings than the artist to his landscape or statue.

We wander through the galleries in the old world, and linger before the works of the great masters, transfixed with the grace and beauty of the ideals that surround us. And with equal preparation, greater than these are possible in living, breathing humanity. Go in imagination from the gallery to the studio of the poor artist, watch him through the restless days, as he struggles with the conception of some grand ideal, and then see how patiently he moulds and remoulds the clay, and when at last, through weary years, the block of marble is transformed into an angel of light, he worships it, and weeps that he cannot breathe into it the breath of life. And lo! by his side are growing up immortal beings to whom he has never given one half the care and thought bestowed on the silent ones that grace his walls. And yet the same devotion to a high ideal of human character, would soon give the world a generation of saints and scholars, of scientists and statesmen, of glorified humanity such as the world has not yet seen. Many good people lose heart in trying to improve their surroundings because they say the influence of one amounts to so little. Remem-

ber it was by the patient toil of generations through centuries that the Colossus of Rhodes, Diana's Temple at Ephesus, the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus, the Pyramids at Egypt, the Pharos at Alexandria, the Hanging Gardens at Babylon, the Olympian Zeus, the seven wonders of the world, grew day by day into enduring monuments to the greatness of humanity. By individual effort the grand result was at last achieved. So the ideal manhood and womanhood, so earnestly prophesied, will become living realities in the future. Remember it took three hundred years to build an Egyptian pyramid. Allowing four generations to a century we have twelve generations of men who passed their lives in that one achievement. Was not the work of those who first evened the ground and laid the foundation-stones as important as of those who laid the capstones at last? Let us, then, begin in our day by the discussion of these vital principles of social science, to even the ground and lay the foundation-stones for the greatest wonder the world is yet to see,—a man in whom the appetites, the passions, the emotions are all held in allegiance to their rightful sovereign, *Reason*. The true words and deeds of successive generations will build up this glorified humanity, fairer than any Parian marble, grander than any colossal sculpture of the East, more exalted than spire or dome, boundless in capacity, in aspiration, limitless as space.