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THE HERBERT SPENCER LECTURE

DELIVERED IN THE SHELDONIAN THEATRE  
ON THE 29TH MAY 1908

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# INDIVIDUALISM AND AFTER

It is a matter of peculiar satisfaction to me that the honour which has come to me of being asked to deliver the Herbert Spencer lecture before the University of Oxford should afford me the opportunity of speaking to you upon the subject which I have chosen for this address. It is not simply that it is a subject which lies very close to my mind and to my own work. One of the principal objects aimed at in this lecture will be to set out, within the brief limits allowed, reasons for conceiving the time in which we are living as the beginning of a period of development and reconstruction which must have unusual results in the future. To do this it is necessary to discuss the meaning of that profoundly influential tendency which has its roots deep in our history, and which is known, particularly in this country and in the United States, as Individualism. There has been no more characteristic, consistent, and devoted exponent of individualism in its theoretical and scientific aspects than Herbert Spencer. It is with this tendency, and with its relations to the principles of evolution, that his name is most closely associated. If it is necessary for the purpose I have in view to exhibit individualism not as an end in itself, but as a preparation for what is to come after, it will be, I trust, in the true spirit of evolutionary knowledge, and with an ever-present sense of the essential greatness of the work which Spencer has accomplished.

It may be recalled that it is now some three-quarters

of a century since John Henry Newman set out on a memorable journey for rest and contemplation in the south of Europe. He was at the time full of the spirit of unrest which was then striving in this University; and he was to return later confirmed in the conviction which had been growing in his mind that there was something wrong in the conclusions which men were drawing from the prevalent tendencies of the time. This conviction, shared in by others and carrying different minds in different directions, was destined later to lead Newman, to the surprise of his generation, to turn his back finally on the principles of what up to that time had been one of the most successful developments in Western history. I refer to this period not because I wish to discuss in detail any of the controversies to which it gave rise, but because I desire to take it as a point of departure.

The time which intervenes between that period and our own has been filled with a series of movements which have extended outwards, apparently from many independent centres. They have come, indeed, to embrace in their influence not only much of the purely intellectual life of our time, but many of its deeper practical activities. In literature, in politics, in art, in legislation, in our conception of the national life, in our theories of society, and even in the fundamental conceptions of philosophy, the more vital controversies of the time all appear to centre round movements which have a certain feature in common. They are all movements the leaders of which emphasize a direction of progress which seems to be away from the principles of what we have known in the past as individualism. It is of these movements,

seen not in isolation, but as the details of a single development related to organic causes, that I wish to speak. Some of the phases of it are described as Reaction, others are spoken of with no less certainty as Revolution. But, it is of this development, seen neither as reaction nor as revolution, but as a movement of Reconstruction, quite unusual as it appears to me in history, a movement carrying within itself not only the life of the future, but with equal certainty the meaning of the past, that I desire to discuss here.

Those who come after us will in all probability make allowance for the fact that it must be a very rare occurrence for any one of us to imagine this particular time in which we are now living as it will appear in the future. Any of us, for instance, may still to-day talk to men whose early years take them back to the days before the period of railways, telegraphs, and ocean steamships—to the days, that is to say, when all the activities of the world were still as distant from each other in time and space as they were in the days of Augustus Caesar. Those who are still our contemporaries have known the time when the white races of the world were scarcely more than a third of their present number, and when applied science had not yet begun those surprising transformations through which the face of this planet would appear changed, if it were possible for us to see it from the depths of space. Even those who are middle-aged can go back to the days before the doctrine of organic evolution, as we now know it, had yet been propounded, and to the time when, in all the sciences, the processes of thought were still striving to orient themselves to the

conception that the history of the world, and indeed of the whole material universe, was comprised within the brief space of 6,000 years.

The political changes are no less remarkable. They constituted, indeed, the principal and dominant preoccupation of men's minds throughout the whole of the period while this transition was in progress. Looking back over the nineteenth century, we see it now as emphatically the century of political democracy, the period of the incoming of the masses of the people to power. The century witnessed the final stages of that struggle, lasting from the Renaissance onward, in which the doctrines of individualism had gradually broken down in Western countries the religious and civil structure of society inherited from former generations. It was in these final stages, moreover, that effect was given to all the events which had preceded them. This was effected by the admission of the people to voting power in most of the leading nations of the West. What France attempted in the way of a universal franchise in its great revolution, and what the United States began in 1783, England completed by stages only in 1832, 1867, and 1885. Germany made advances towards the same goal in 1867 and 1871; and Italy, Holland, Spain, Belgium, and other countries have each in turn in recent days adopted a wide popular franchise. Scarcely more than a period of a hundred years, that is to say, has witnessed the steps which have effected silently what is probably the most pregnant political change that has ever taken place in the world, namely, the admission of the people to power among the leading nations of the

West by forms of electoral franchise which in most cases fall little short of universal suffrage.

It was in the conditions of Western thought in which this revolution was in progress that the doctrine of organic evolution through natural selection was launched in England by Darwin in the second half of the nineteenth century. It will be a fact familiar to most of us who have endeavoured to keep touch with the science and thought of other countries that the effects produced in England by this theory of organic evolution have been from the beginning deeper, more widespread, and more potent than in any other country. This is a result due to causes which are rarely referred to in our literature. I will endeavour here to touch briefly on one of the chief of those causes. It will bring me to the question to which it is one of the principal objects of this lecture to attempt an answer, namely, whether the altogether exceptional conditions of thought in which the doctrine of evolution was launched in Western history have not hitherto operated in preventing us from perceiving in some measure the real application to society of the larger meaning which is inherent in it.

In Great Britain the conflict in which the liberty of the individual had been attained had been exceptionally severe and prolonged. The prestige of the results obtained was so great that, as Maine points out, it has profoundly influenced the tendencies of development throughout the modern world.<sup>1</sup> This is, indeed, the ultimate fact of history, often hidden from sight when in the phrase of the day it is sometimes said that we are

<sup>1</sup> *Popular Government*, by H. S. Maine.



living in the age of the Americanization of the world. We have, therefore, to recognize the importance of the fact that the tendencies of thought which had produced individualism in Great Britain and the United States were, in the nature of things, exceptionally developed in both countries. These tendencies may be said to have culminated in England between 1850 and 1860.

One can hardly open any serious political or philosophical book of this period without being impressed with the peculiar intellectual atmosphere of the time. If we take a sober treatise like John Stuart Mill's *Logic*, or better still the same author's *Essay on Liberty*, it may be observed how throughout the argument history is made to furnish a kind of lurid background for the great theme which is in the author's mind, namely, the emancipation of the individual from government. We see government in all its forms presented by Mill essentially as a thing of evil. In the opening pages of the *Essay on Liberty*, the past is discussed as a time when government might indeed have been necessary to keep other tyrants in check, but in which it always tended to become, as Mill expressed it, 'the king of the vultures no less bent upon preying on the flock than any of the minor harpies.'<sup>1</sup> It is essential to remember that this view was not an exceptional one. It expressed the spirit of the dominant political and social philosophy of the period. Henry Sidgwick,<sup>2</sup> Leslie Stephen,<sup>3</sup> and many others<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *On Liberty*, by J. S. Mill, c. i.

<sup>2</sup> *Henry Sidgwick, A Memoir*, by A. S. and E. M. S., c. ii.

<sup>3</sup> *The English Utilitarians*, vol. iii.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Professor Marshall's *Principles of Economics*, vol. i, B. I. first edition.

have described to us in detail the remarkable ascendancy in English thought, and at the centres of learning, of the general views represented by Mill at this period. The accepted social and political theories had all the same mark on them. Every kind of government and organized institution in the State tended to be regarded with suspicion by the leaders of the ruling school of opinion. In Herbert Spencer's Autobiography the reader realizes the kind of passionate hostility to all the activities of the State which Spencer inherited from his intellectual ancestry and obtained in particular from the environment of his time. The Synthetic Philosophy in its relation to society is much more than a system of philosophy. It is one of the greatest dramas ever produced by the human mind, a drama, unfolded in many volumes, of the emancipation of the activities of the individual from the rule of all governments and institutions—military, political, social, ecclesiastical, and economic—organized in the State. We have come to talk in these days of attracting the best ability to the service of the State. In the middle of the nineteenth century Mill would have none of it. It might, he said, place a most dangerous kind of premium on bureaucracy. For the more qualified the heads of officialism the greater, he said, would be the hold of the evil upon us.<sup>1</sup> All-embracing State functions, said Spencer, towards the end of his life-work, are characteristic of a low social type. Progress to a higher social type is marked by a gradual relinquishment by the State of its compulsory functions.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *On Liberty*, by J. S. Mill, c. v.

<sup>2</sup> *Principles of Ethics*, 369, see also 365-82.

The spirit of these opinions has pervaded the whole political and economic life of Great Britain in a period through which most of us have lived, at least in part. The emphasis was laid to an extraordinary degree not only on the unrestricted freedom, but on the self-sufficiency of the individual. Emancipated from government, the individual was capable, it was held, of reaching, through unrestricted competition with other individuals equally untrammelled, the very highest possible results in every sphere of human activity. And he was capable, it was said, of thus reaching them not only with the greatest profit to himself, but with the highest good to the greatest number of his fellows. The spirit of unlimited competition, of the most intense individualism, and at the same time of the widest cosmopolitanism, breathed through it all. Mill's principles sanctioned not only the freest exchanges of economic products, but also the freest exchanges of human labour between nations,<sup>1</sup> even, it would appear by implication, to the extent of working the mills of Lancashire with labour from Central Asia. The merchant, said Adam Smith, is the citizen of no country. It is not the advantage of society, but his own advantage, which the merchant has in view. But the merchant, by following his own advantage, is necessarily led at the same time to serve the best interest of society.<sup>2</sup> We speak nowadays of a possible divergence between the interests of the individual under conditions of unrestricted competition and the interests of society, and of the subordination of the individual to society.

<sup>1</sup> *Principles of Political Economy*, B. III. xvii.

<sup>2</sup> *Wealth of Nations*, iv.

The principles of the time were incompatible with the meaning which is usually attached to such a saying. 'If,' said Mill, 'all mankind minus one were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person, than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind.'<sup>1</sup>

When Darwin published the *Origin of Species*, the firm hold which the doctrine of natural selection almost immediately obtained on men's minds in England was, I think, undoubtedly due in the first place to the resemblance which was discovered in it to the views which had thus come to prevail throughout the whole fabric of the social, political, and economic life of the time. Spencer, who had to some extent anticipated Darwin, and whose fundamental conceptions had been already developed in his early writings, immediately became the principal interpreter of the doctrine of evolution in its applications to society. The *Origin of Species* dealt principally with the individual struggle for existence in forms of life below human society. It appeared therefore to emphasize the universal self-sufficiency of the individual and the effectiveness of individual competition. Darwin seemed to lift the veil from life, and to present to the gaze of his time, as prevailing throughout nature, a picture of the self-centred struggle of the individual ruthlessly pursuing his own interests and yet unconsciously pursuing them, as it was the teaching of the economic science of the day that he pursued them in human society—to his own perfection and at the same time to the highest possible good of his kind.

<sup>1</sup> *On Liberty*, c. ii.

The doctrine of evolution, in short, appeared to give the last sanction to individualism and to all the tendencies which from the period of the Renaissance onwards had been making for emancipation. It was taken by many to be a doctrine which justified from the fundamental order of nature the claim of the individual to stand forth—as the extreme advocates of individualism had always insisted—independent of all social powers, organizations, institutions, and creeds, as being himself the end of evolution, the Atlas who carried forward on his shoulders, in the struggle which he waged with his fellows for his own visible interests in his own lifetime, the end and welfare of the whole order of the world which surrounded him.

The position which I have now to put before you may be described somewhat in this way. I need not here emphasize the importance of the work accomplished in our civilization by the theories of individualism. I have enlarged on that subject elsewhere. Only opinions held with similar strength and extremity of conviction could have achieved such results.<sup>1</sup> But the theory of organic evolution was launched in England, as I have here shown, when these theories of individualism had reached their extreme development. The phase of the evolution doctrine which Darwin presented at this psychological moment was a phase dealing almost exclusively with the struggle for existence as between individuals and among forms of life below human society. Darwin attempted no systematic study of society. A species is not in itself

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Principles of Western Civilization*, New Edition, Introduction and cix-xi.

a social group, and there is little in any of his works to suggest to us the widely different principles, as I conceive them, which must regulate under the stress of natural selection the integration of social types and in particular of a social type resting ultimately on mind.<sup>1</sup>

I am therefore led to this question: Can it be that the meaning of our times, and even the real meaning of the doctrine of evolution in its applications to society, have been hitherto largely obscured from us through seeking to interpret both through the theories of individualism? Or I would put it in this way: Have we still to recognize the fact that the individualism I have been here describing has no final meaning in itself, and that its real significance lies in the fact that it is the doctrine of a transition period preliminary to and preparatory to a more important stage upon which we are already entering?

You will admit, perhaps, that these are important questions. If they have to be answered in any degree in the affirmative, those who are still young among us will probably live to see great developments. In attempting to find an answer to them, it is, perhaps, desirable to

<sup>1</sup> Thus in *The Descent of Man* Darwin appears to think that civilized nations, by their practice of caring for the sick and maimed, are tending to suspend the operation of the law of natural selection in society by preventing the elimination of the unfit. There is no discussion of the organic meaning in the integration of society of the growing sense of responsibility to life which is characteristic of the more civilized races, or of the significance in relation to the law of natural selection in social evolution, as distinct from individual evolution, of the deepening of the social consciousness of which this sense of responsibility to our fellow creatures is one of the outward marks.



turn now for a moment away from the conclusions of theoretical knowledge as they have hitherto prevailed amongst us, and to envisage the actual world of to-day as it exists in the making—the grim, stressful world of life, where movements in thought and action are emerging largely independent of past theories and in obedience only to the forces of growth which are producing them. Let us see how far the exponents of individualism are proving themselves to have been justified in their claim to have explained to us the direction and meaning of our times.

If we regard existing tendencies in the State, and in particular those movements of the time which most evidently have the life of the future in them, the facts are of a kind to cause reflection. For the past thirty or forty years in England development in the State has been decidedly in a particular direction. So far from witnessing any tendency to the progressive restriction of the functions of the State, which was anticipated in the dominant political theories of the recent past, we have to take note of the rapid and continuous extension in every direction of its power and responsibilities. This development has become one of the most marked features of our time. It extends to all the activities of government, from national and imperial interests to municipal affairs. The enormous extension of the functions of the State is indicated by the increase in expenditure. For two decades, almost though not quite coincident with the sixties and seventies—that is to say, after the doctrines of individualism had reached their highest influence in Great Britain—the public expenditure of the United King-

dom, we may observe, tended to remain almost stationary. But it has since almost doubled in amount. The rate of increase, also, is most rapid in recent years. This is not by any means occasioned simply by increased expenditure on the defensive services. The increase, for instance, in the large expenditure of the purely civil services of the State has been quite fifty per cent. in the ten years preceding this in which we are living.

The extension in the functions of government indicated by the growth of local and municipal taxation has been still greater. During the past fifteen years the amount raised as revenue by local authorities in the United Kingdom, from rates alone, excluding income from public undertakings, loans, and other sources, has more than doubled. It now reaches a sum equal to the total of the annual national expenditure a quarter of a century ago. I need not enlarge upon the history of the extension of the functions of the State which lies behind these facts. It forms indeed the principal part of the history of our times. One has but to reflect that almost every large contentious question of the day involves some proposal to extend the functions of the State, to realize how considerable the change has been. The development in question touches almost every sphere of the activities of our time. In commerce, industry, finance, public undertakings, education, law, agriculture, health, morals, in all the relations of labour to the State and to Capital, and in the relations of the national activities to those of other countries, we have to notice how the functions of the State are being extended on every hand. It must be confessed that there is no indication here of that



progressive relinquishment by the State of its functions which was anticipated by Spencer. The reasons also which J. S. Mill considered cogent and conclusive that there should be a restriction of government to the lowest possible minimum do not seem to have prevailed in practice.

The feeling which may be distinguished in the general mind as prompting these marked changes calls specially for remark. There are a great number of opinions about the extension of the functions of the State, and there is great diversity of view even amongst those who are most active in desiring it. There is, however, I think, a common denominator to which all the views may be reduced in so far as they are submitted in the public interest. They may all be distinguished as urging a more organic conception of society. It was the most fundamental principle of the individualism of the past that the interests of the individual in pursuit of his own ends in competition with his fellows was coincident with the highest good of society. *Laissez-faire* therefore became a first principle of government. What we are apparently now witnessing, with the extension of the functions of the State, is the growth of a conviction that the two things are not the same, and that the highest good of the community is not, and possibly cannot be, reached by unregulated competition between private interests. This is obviously the opinion which is common to all the theories of extension of the functions of government. But it will be observed how it strikes at the central principle of the dominant theories of the past.

The opinion of economists of the ruling English school

in the past has been most pronounced. The individual, according to Adam Smith, in following his own advantage, was necessarily best serving the interests of society. But for the past half-century, in the relations between capital and labour on the one hand, and between the State and labour on the other, the corporate consciousness appears to have been gradually withdrawing its assent to this opinion. We have accordingly had in England an increasing tendency towards the interference of the State in the struggle between individuals. Legislative Acts have been passed which have regulated employment in factories, which have forbidden child-labour, which have reduced the hours of labour, which have given the right of combination to workmen, and which have even given official recognition to the principle that in agreements between labour and public authorities there should be a fair wage as distinguished from a competitive wage. Here again it is the more organic view which seems to be prevailing, in that the fact is emphasized that the good of the competitors in a state of unrestricted competition between individuals is not the same thing as the good of society.

When we turn from the State in its relation to labour to the State in relation to capital the facts continue to suggest reflection. The old individualistic theory of the State contemplated, as has been said, the prevalence of practically unrestricted competition as the principle of life in all things. But the sponsors for this view do not seem to have anticipated to any extent the kind of problems arising out of the modern tendencies of the world under stress of competition. One of the most

noticeable facts of the time, resulting largely from that shrinkage of the world as regards time and distance already referred to, is the tendency of capital to aggregation and then to forms of oligarchy as an ultimate phase inherent in the conditions of competition.

Those who have anticipated the system of voluntary co-operation, which Spencer said was to take the place of the State in the future, have always given us the instance of joint-stock enterprise as one of the best examples of how the functions of the State were to be superseded by private enterprise. Here it was said we have a voluntary republic engaged in a business enterprise. Every shareholder has the right to vote; the shareholders elect and control the management, and all the benefits are equally divisible. Finally, ownership in modern joint-stock enterprise is becoming more and more widely distributed, and is tending to embrace all the activities of our time. We have thus in view, it was said, all the stages of the easy and successful accomplishment of what Spencer predicted.

But when we look at the real facts of the world the conditions present something quite different. Under the modern tendency of capital to aggregation, we seem to see nearly every one of the vital principles of co-operation, which it has taken the political State thousands of years of evolution to establish only partially, fundamentally violated, and this apparently by necessity inherent in the conditions. For instance, from long before the days so familiar to us in history, when we see the select body of Athenian citizens assembling in person in the Pnyx as the ultimate source of all law and authority, down

to the present day, the continuous struggle in the political State has been a vote for every man, and then for an equal vote not weighted by wealth or position. But the first principle of joint-stock enterprise is of necessity voting power according to the amount of holding. The tendency from the outset is therefore towards oligarchy, this becoming pronounced as aggregation continues.

Problems like representation, the necessity for publicity, the continuity of membership, the identification of the interests of the management with those of the members, and many others which it has cost the State such struggles to overcome, find no solution in joint-stock enterprise. Under the modern conditions of sale and purchase many of them have assumed new phases. It is inevitable, also, that it should be possible for the management to enrich themselves simply by foreseeing, as a matter of course, the rise and fall of the stock-exchange values of their securities. ✓

Driven by the stress of competition, the tendency of capital to aggregation is producing other results that are remarkable. The United States Steel Corporation recently held its annual meeting in America. This corporation has control of revenues and finances which compare with those of a first-class State. It deals with one of the greatest industries in the world, and its shareholders are widely distributed in many countries. In a newspaper report of the meeting we read that the management voted proxies representing some 4,700,000 shares. The number of stock-holders who attended and voted personally was twenty. The report added laconically that all the acts of the management during the year were confirmed.

An example of this kind brings fairly home to the mind how the conditions of the world are moving beyond the older theories. Beneath all the extreme views of the time we may distinguish, I think, the growth of a general feeling that the interests of competitors following their own ends in a state of unregulated competition between capital, equally as in the case of unregulated competition between labour, may possibly not be as economists in the past imagined, the same thing as the interests of society. It is, in short, in this case also, towards some more organic conception of society than was contemplated in the individualistic theories of the past that the facts of the time seem to be carrying us.

If we extend our view into the relation of States to each other, and into the conceptions of the meaning of the State, an equally striking change seems to be taking place in our time. One of the most pronounced characteristics of Western thought towards the middle of the nineteenth century was its cosmopolitanism. That earlier political phase which had been represented in France by the literature of the Revolution, and that other culture phase which had been nurtured in Germany on the universalist conceptions of Kant, Lessing, Herder, Goethe, and other interpreters, had been provided in England with a practical basis. It was insisted that the ideal condition of the world for the maximum production of wealth, and therefore, it was said, for international peace and progress, was one in which the exchanges of both labour and capital would be so absolutely untrammelled by considerations of nationalism that they would move, for instance, between China and England, as Mill

said, with the same ease and freedom as between two English counties.

No change which has taken place in the world in our time is more striking than the assertion of what has been called the passion of nationalism against the cosmopolitan ideals of the Early Victorian period. This movement takes in our day innumerable forms.<sup>1</sup> It extends from the Celtic revival, through many recent expressions of nationalism in Great Britain, the United States, and other countries, up to what is called a policy of imperialism, the latter embracing among ourselves both political and economic proposals for the federation of the British Empire. In these movements the increasing emphasis that is laid on the life-principle of small nationalities is very often contrasted with imperialism, the two tendencies being regarded as antagonistic. I think this view is possibly not correct.

What we are witnessing here also is, I think, the same gradual and general movement of the social mind towards a more organic conception of society. The ideas of growth, development, and progress now coming to be scientifically applied to society are in their very nature inseparably connected with the future. In the case of the social organism, as in the case of the individual, the difference between the more evolved and the primitive mind consists largely in the power of subordinating the passing needs of the present to those more organic needs which include the welfare of the future. A most marked and universal feature of social progress at the present time

<sup>1</sup> Compare its expression, for instance, in Mr. G. K. Chesterton's

is therefore the increasing perception of the importance in the evolution of the world of the ideas which render society more organic in this sense of subordinating the present to the future. They are the greatest, the most lasting, and the most potent asset that a people can possess. It is in the increasing perception of the relation of this fact to all the ideas included under the head of nationalism that we have, I think, the true explanation of the present tendency throughout the world to emphasize nationality as a factor in evolution. It is a tendency which exists side by side with the conception of civilization as a whole developing toward a higher unity. But it is a tendency which is exercising at present a profoundly disturbing influence on many conceptions of the past and in particular on economic theories.

I have endeavoured to represent so far the meaning of our times to consist in a general movement of the Western mind under a great variety of phases towards a more organic conception of society. If I am right in this attempt, it is at this point, perhaps, that I approach most nearly the heart of the subject. It was pointed out at the beginning that when the theory of evolution was launched in England the conditions of thought were peculiar. If I were asked to choose a passage from the literature of the nineteenth century best calculated to exhibit the nature of the change I am attempting to describe, I would select a passage from Herbert Spencer's writings. It represents Spencer's position between what I think will prove to be two eras of the world's thought. The passage in question appears in an article published



in 1860<sup>1</sup>, the subject of which was afterwards embodied, although not in such extreme form, in his *Principles of Sociology*.<sup>2</sup>

In this article Spencer examined the conception of the social organism, comparing the principles of its life with those of the individual organism. He found the two in agreement in many conspicuous peculiarities. But there was, he said, one fundamental difference. While in the individual organism the welfare of all the parts is rightly subservient to the welfare of the whole, in society the living units, he said, could never merge their individual interests and consciousness in any corporate consciousness. 'And this,' continued Spencer, 'is an everlasting reason why the welfare of citizens cannot rightly be sacrificed to some supposed benefit of the State. . . . The corporate life here must be subservient to the lives of the parts, instead of the lives of the parts being subservient to the corporate life.'

If we scrutinize closely the terms of this statement we must, I think, recognize it as epitomizing, in a manner so complete as to be found nowhere else, the spirit and meaning of the phase of thought known as individualism. Spencer's saying that the corporate life must be subordinate to the lives of the units, and not the units to the corporate life, represents probably the highest point touched in Western history by the claims of individualism. It marks the distance which had been travelled from the Greek theory of society. But it marks also, I think, no less decidedly the position to which we will

<sup>1</sup> *Westminster Review*, January, 1860.

<sup>2</sup> *Principles of Sociology*, 212-71.



in future look back as the starting-point of a new development.

Now if with this passage from Spencer in mind we turn again to the history of our times, nothing can be more significant than the effect which the more organic conception of society may be seen to be producing on the doctrine of evolution itself in its applications to social theories. It will be apparent, on reflection, that Spencer's conception of a corporate life subordinate to the interests of the units comprising it, is in the nature of things invalid. It is the correlative of that conception of the individual struggle for existence which was first presented by Darwin. It is evident that it is impossible to conceive society in any scientific sense as a mere mob of units of this kind whose individual interests could be paramount over the corporate interests.

I have pointed out at some length elsewhere that the first meaning of an organism as such is that its efficiency is superior to the sum total of the efficiency of all its individual units acting as units.<sup>1</sup> The evolution of society under the stress of natural selection is along the lines of its greatest efficiency, and it follows that in all the struggles of human history what is gradually being evolved is the more efficient—that is to say, the more organic social type. Whether the individual be conscious of it or not, the tendency of the evolutionary process will therefore inevitably render the interests of the units subordinate to the interests of the corporate life.

As soon as we realize this it appears to me that we

<sup>1</sup> *The Significance of the Future in the Theory of Evolution*: Two lectures, Royal Institution, London, 1906.

come in sight of a new set of ideas. What we see is that in society the meaning of evolution can centre only in a secondary sense in the struggle for existence between individuals. As in the case of nationality, though in a deeper sense, the ruling meaning of the social process lies in the causes which are rendering society increasingly organic by subordinating the units to the meaning of the whole and the present to the meaning of the future. It is the ideas and the integrating conceptions of the human mind, hitherto mainly represented in the great systems of religion which are rendering society organic in this higher sense, that furnish the principles round which the process of social evolution centres and that constitute the greatest asset which a civilization can possess. It is here again with the social organism as with the individual organism. The struggle in the primitive stage is for the present life. But as integration continues, the difference between the primitive and the more evolved consists, as has been said before, largely in the power of subordinating the impulses of the present to the more organic needs in which the welfare of the future is included. The history of the world is not simply a history of the struggle for life. It is to an ever-increasing degree a history of the struggle for the life of the future.

If we look round the world we see most of the leading nations burthened with huge national debts, which often constitute a great encumbrance to their development. It is a matter of general knowledge that no civilized people has yet been able consistently to follow such a moderate policy of subordination of the present to the

future as would suffice to wipe out in the course of a generation these heavy mortgages on the future. So little is the social consciousness organic under the influence of motives of this kind. Whether we regard man as a political animal or as an economic animal, we see him in history as Dryden described him,

Unconstant still, and various ;  
There's no to-morrow in him like to-day.

But there is a point of view from which we get a different spectacle. We see the Western peoples as a whole held in a system of ideas which dates back to the Christian era. The conceptions arising out of these ideas have influenced at every point the development of our political and social institutions, our standards of conduct and our laws. Under their influence generations of men have made the greatest sacrifices of which human nature is capable in order to subserve the ideals, personal, political, and social, which they have set before themselves under this influence. The conceptions in question have so profoundly deepened the social consciousness that for centuries we have been living in a development in which we see the occupying classes unable to offer any serious resistance in yielding their places before the incoming people, first of all in the demand for equal political rights, and now in the demand for the equality of opportunity. Although it is a commonplace of thought, it represents one of the profoundest of sociological truths when we say that these ideas have created the distinctive ethos of Western civilization ; for they thereby continue to give direction, even though leaders of movements may often be entirely unconscious of it, to most of the ten-

dencies which are recognized as characteristic of our times.

It would be impossible to conceive any economic or political motive influencing the human mind so consistently and so continuously, and on so large a scale, and producing over so prolonged a period results of such character and magnitude. It has been said of the Synthetic Philosophy that Spencer found little place in it for systems of religion except in relation to our emancipation from the past. But no change which is in progress in our time as the result of the extending conception of society is more striking than that which is taking place in our estimate of the influence in the evolution of society of the integrating conceptions of the human mind hitherto represented mainly in the great systems of religion, which are thus in the deepest sense of all rendering society organic. It would seem as if it is these stones which the builders of social science in the past have rejected that we must place now as the head-stones of the corners.

I must not stay to follow this movement of change into its effects on the current developments in philosophy, and even on our current theories of art. Nor can I wait to discuss the influence on many systems of thought, of the conception that the full meaning of the individual is in the social process, and that it cannot therefore be reached through an introspective study alone of the individual's mind. For it is not so much the human mind which is constructing the social process. It is the social process which is constructing the human mind. I must make allowance for the possibility that I may be speaking ignorantly, and therefore altogether

overrating the importance of the change as it appears to me. But these conceptions, as I see them, in their wider applications, seem to imply that we are reaching thereby one of the most pregnant positions in the development of Western thought since the days of Plato.

If I pursue to the end the more direct issues suggested by the line of thought I have here opened, I cannot, perhaps, avoid considering the more immediate practical applications. No one can follow in their relation to the modern socialist movement any of the larger questions of the day without perceiving how serious and far-reaching are the problems which are tending to be associated with this universal deepening of the social consciousness. There are, however, certain facts of the time which add greatly to the difficulties of many in seeking for guidance as to the direction in which new developments may be carrying us. The great authority justly acquired among us of the views hitherto held by exponents of individualism, and the fact that the movement itself has been closely associated with one of the greatest developments in Western history, namely, that which has emancipated the activities of the individual, suggest a great weight of responsibility in giving countenance to any proposal for departure from principles so closely identified with a long era of successful development in the past. These reasons receive additional force and cogency for many persons when they observe the proposals which are often made by leaders on the other side in various contemporary movements.

It is possible that we are yet far from fully anticipating how the principles of the past may in their deeper meaning,

though not in their old form, be applicable to the future. It is not improbable that the gains of the past will be seen to be all necessary and preliminary to the next stage, and that continuity with the past will be clearly visible as that transition stage upon which we appear to be entering develops. Let me try to explain briefly what may possibly be before us.

Beneath all the extreme views of the time in many countries, there is a fact which must always be kept in mind. It is not the opinions of men, however earnest, which can give any type of society a permanent place in the world. We may hold any convictions about our Utopias, and we may even convince others as to the expediency of our views; but there is one condition alone upon which any institutions can ultimately prevail. They will have to win out in the stern stress of the world solely in respect of one quality—their efficiency. They must have the compelling merit of being efficient when compared with others.

Now regarding the current world as far as possible detached from prepossessions, we cannot mistake the fact that it is the organic principles and the organic views of society which are thus making headway. Although the prestige of the individualistic view of the world has been great in the past; although governments in many civilized countries seem to be continually protesting they will never consent to any radical interference with its principles; yet in the process of parliaments we seem to see most of them steadily consenting.

We are living, it must be remembered, in the days of organization. The nations who understand the meaning



of what Spencer called the long sequences in the social process have the power of producing results never before possible. The instinct which has recently possessed the world of the value of nationality in this new light has been referred to. But it suggests a wider meaning than I have touched on. In the rivalry of nations and peoples it is often as in the rivalry between individual forms of life. When a new environment arises, natural selection often finds the most suitable basis for adaptation in forms which were peculiar to earlier types. It is often overlooked, for instance, in the case of the great success of modern Germany, how much she owes to the fact that, in the current age of organization and long sequences, the institutions of an earlier order of society, largely directed through the State, have survived more completely than in England, where our long era of successful individualism has weakened the ideas on which they rested. Her State railways, for instance, primarily intended for military organization, have lent themselves with extraordinary success to the requirements of modern industry. And so in a hundred other instances in that country.

The case of Japan is a still more striking example. A generation or two ago the peculiar methods of work in that country were counted as no more than an interesting survival from an early age of social institutions. Gangs of Japanese navvies, for instance, in working used their picks in unison and struck their blows to the sound of some rhythmic measure. But when in the present age organization in its deeper sense has become a ruling principle of the world ; when we see Western arts, arma-

ments, science, and industry adopted by the Japanese people, and the results directed through the nation as a whole with similar organic unison of purpose to thought-out ends in which there is a clear conception of the subordination of the present to the future, we have the surprising spectacle of an Eastern people in a decade or two emerging from the condition of mediaeval Europe and almost suddenly taking its place among the nations as one of the first powers of the world.

The present age, it has been said, is often spoken of as the age of the Americanization of the world, a phrase which implies the importance of a particular phase of our own development. There is, however, a deep and true sense in which the next age will probably be also the age of the Germanization of the world. For it is those lessons of which the first stages have been displayed in the history of modern Prussia which are likely to be worked out in their fuller applications by successful States in the future.

It is in this connexion that the larger meaning of our own history, including the meaning of our individualism in the past, will probably be visible. On the one hand it seems clear that we are moving towards organization in its larger applications, and are therefore reaching the time when the meaning of the interests of society in long sequences will be consistently applied to conceptions of national policy abroad and of social policy at home as they have never been applied before. But on the other hand there is a lesson upon which our history has placed an emphasis no less arresting. We profoundly distrust not only all despotisms, however benevolent, but all



oligarchies and bureaucracies, however enlightened, if allowed to reach their ultimate tendencies. Nay, more, we know, perhaps more thoroughly than any other people, that it is the meaning of the world that we do well to distrust them. It has happened, therefore, that in our history we have displaced all systems of authority as working principles of the State.

Now it is one of the features of all healthy organisms that their vital processes are for the most part subconscious. It is perhaps for this reason that we do not always, even in our textbooks, rise to the level of consciousness of what it is that constitutes the most characteristic, as it certainly is the most vital, of the principles expressed in our own evolution as a people, namely, the principle by which we have replaced all systems of authority in the State. It consists in practice in this: We recognize instinctively that no institution can be trusted to develop its full meaning and to maintain its efficiency except in one condition—the condition of continuous stress represented by the permanent competitive opposition of another institution in which is embodied a counter-principle. The constitutional struggle between the people and the sovereign in England gave us the parliamentary system with all its counterpoises. The conflict between centralization and decentralization has produced the colonial system of Great Britain and the federal constitution of the United States. And the stress of affairs has developed in English and American law and opinion a theory of the supreme importance of maintaining in all circumstances a free conflict of forces.

But over and above all other results this is the solution which, under the institution of party government, we have found for the problem of political democracy. Probably under no other condition could that problem—the supreme problem of the last two centuries—have been solved after we had displaced the theory of Divine right in the State. By the system of party government we have compelled each of the two permanent parties in the State—which have been in effect the occupying classes and the incoming classes—to organize its case to its fullest value on each side of a line of cleavage in a normal attitude of unchanging opposition. Although we are not yet in the position to fully appreciate the results, for we are still in the thick of the fight, they certainly mark one of the greatest achievements in history. For generations the case of the incoming party amongst us has been separated from its extravagances and absurdities : institutions have been modified gradually, and only as full proof has been shown ; each party has retained the respect of the other without bitterness ; and the occupying classes have come to accept the modifications which are taking place as part of the progressive order of the world.

It seems to me likely that it is this principle of efficiency which has enabled us thus to solve the transition of the modern world to political democracy—and modern popular government, as Maine said, is of purely English origin—that we are about to carry into the next and greater era of transition in which our problems will be economic rather than political. On the one side we see now a conviction strongly entrenched in all the

institutions of our time of the superiority of private enterprise under voluntary co-operation as applied to all the affairs of the world. On the other side we see largely held an opposing conviction that the necessity is developing for greatly extended corporate action on the part of the State, and that the corporate consciousness, acting through the State, can alone carry through those long sequences of the public weal in which the present must be subordinate to the future. We have here two counter-principles which the meaning of our history will, it seems to me, drive us to embody in two normally antagonized policies in the future. Probably in no other way can either policy be trusted to develop its full meaning and its full efficiency in the future.

If it be indeed that the State, under the direction of a more organic social consciousness, can carry forms of co-operative activity to results in the public interest which are beyond the powers of voluntary competitive enterprise, then of one thing we may be certain—there is no principle at present visible in the world which will ultimately prevent the State in successful societies from doing so.

I trust I have in some small measure succeeded in the object with which I set out in this lecture. I have endeavoured to exhibit the leading feature of our times as a movement of the world under many forms towards a more organic conception of society. It is a fact becoming visible that the social organism is tending to be regarded as something wider than the political State. It is a fact in evidence that the life of our civilization is more organic than the life of any of the States or

nations included in it. And it is a fact of the times also becoming clearer in social science that the fundamental principle of the life of that civilization is a common inheritance in the influence of those conceptions which have produced that progressive deepening of the social consciousness which I have described to you. But while all these things are so, it is probably equally true that never before did the organic principle of nationality count for more as one of the causes carrying us towards that higher stage when the social organism will be identical with civilization. Spencer contemplated voluntary co-operative enterprise as taking the place of the State. But he does not appear to have allowed for the fact that there is a sense in which the purified State may in future stand for the greatest of all voluntary co-operations. This ancient University has witnessed and taken large part in the events through which the main flood of the life of our civilization has come down in no small measure in the channels of our national history. It has seen a small nation expand into a world-wide empire whose constitution is so indefinite that it scarcely exists, but whose life is so incomprehensibly organic that it is able without any principle of compulsion, as we saw it able but yesterday, to summon its kin from the ends of the earth to fight in its cause. Nay, more, the history of this small nation has become the meaning of a larger system of life represented, as it will be within living experience, by two hundred millions, and within a century by four hundred millions, of people speaking one language and inheriting one law and one ethos. To understand these things is to feel the sense

of the organic upon us, and to realize deeply what that sense of the organic may accomplish in the future. We are probably entering on a new era of development, but we enter on it with an enormous impetus from history behind us.

I do not know, in conclusion, whether you will call me reactionary or revolutionary. If you would apply either adjective I would defend myself by quoting a conclusion reached by Spencer towards the end of one of his books.<sup>1</sup> The study of social science, he said, properly followed, had one marked result—it was likely to render the inquirer ‘radical to a degree beyond anything which current radicalism conceives’; but at the same time ‘conservative to a degree beyond anything conceived by present conservatism’.

<sup>1</sup> *The Study of Sociology*, xvi.