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THE WORLD IS GROWING BETTER

FIRST of all, we are faced with the need to define progress, or growing better.

The idea of growing better cannot be confined to one nation, though of course it will show itself more in one than in another. Nor can it be described only in terms of happiness, because idiots are happier than geniuses. The only way to think reasonably of progress in human life is by considering it as increasing control of our environment — of all the things which affect the realization of our desires.

As Will Durant put it in *The Mansions of Philosophy*: "Progress is the domination of chaos by mind and purpose, of matter by form and will."

In this sense the world is growing better. Many ills of yesterday have passed away. The total and average level of human ability has increased, and stands at its peak today.

When we take a total view, comparing our existence in 1952 with the ignorance, superstition, brutality and diseases of primitive people, we are a little comforted, even though we realize that life is still precarious and chaotic.

Here and there we may find people who differ only slightly from the untutored mass of other days, but above those strata we see many millions who have reached to mental and moral heights of which the primitive mind never thought.

None of us supposes that life in each century is better than in the one before, but if we view the human scene as from a great altitude the movement is of that sort. The standard of living is far higher now, on the average, than in any previous period in history. Deprecate as some persons may the age in which we live, yet we are conscious of a certain pride in the increasing inventiveness which marks our culture, and the improvement, still all-too-slow, in human relations.

Science the Thinker

Some persons, of course, look to our modern science for too much. They want all the woes and ills of the world cured immediately by scientific

methods. But we must reflect that man has existed for no one knows how long. Some say a million years. Science and its techniques have been with us for only a couple of hundred years. Any schoolboy in our time can learn more of the universe than Ptolemy knew, and the most humdrum thesis writer in one of our universities has more knowledge at his fingertips than was available to the giant mind of Aristotle.

Our ancestors fought plagues with sacrifices to angry gods who roamed the skies astride meteors and in star-carriages; modern men fight and exterminate plagues by scientific knowledge. Our curiosity has led us to play with a tea kettle and put into use the power of steam; to mix this and that in a retort and discover chemistry; to send a kite into the sky and bring down electricity. The triumphs of science have been gained by studying facts, by seeking out the natural law and working in harmony with it. Innumerable facts of nature which once were merely data are now opportunities.

Health

One great field where undoubted progress has been made is that of health. The period since the beginning of the nineteenth century — and especially the 100 years since the middle of that century — are outstanding in history as an era of progress in combating disease and death, and in lengthening the average span of human life.

Nowhere has this been shown more dramatically than in a report published in January this year by the United Nations Economic and Social Council. It is called *Findings of Studies on the Relationships between Population Trends and Economic and Social Factors*.

Though knowledge of mortality conditions in the early centuries is meagre, it is clear that life was short in those times. A life table for Greece, prepared from burial inscriptions, places the average length of life about 400 B.C. somewhere near 30 years. In the first century B.C., the estimated expectation of life in Egypt was about 22 years. In European countries between the thirteenth and the seventeenth centuries one

might expect to live from 20 to 40 years, and in Sweden the eighteenth century life expectancy was 33 to 40 years.

These contrast sharply with the present expectancy of life in European countries and in areas inhabited by Europeans overseas, many of which are above 65 years. The latest table available for Canada (1947) sets our life expectancy at 65.18 years for males and 69.05 years for females.

There are various reasons for the lowering of death rates and the prolongation of life: the science of medicine, more and better food, sanitary living conditions, and a lightening of work.

Authors of all works on the subject, says the United Nations report, are agreed that the impressive reduction of mortality rates in the European cultural sphere since the eighteenth century has been due largely to the great improvement in the economic position of the people.

Industrialization, commercial development, and the increasing efficiency of agriculture provided the economic basis for more abundant and more healthful living and for the advances in public health and medicine which made the present low mortality rates possible.

The Western World

The progress — not only in health but in many other areas of life — during the past couple of centuries has been worked by men and women in the western world, and is being passed along by them in individual and collective action to still underprivileged countries.

It is important that not only leaders but all the people should know what it is the West has to offer in its way of life, its conquest of poverty, its high standard of education, and its diminution of disease.

What the West has discovered, says Bertrand Russell in his book *New Hopes for a Changing World*, though as yet the realization is incomplete, is a method by which practically everybody can have as much of material goods as is conducive to happiness, without excessive hours of labour, and with that degree of mental culture that is needed to make leisure delightful.

This state, brought about by the fact that one man's work can now produce much more than is required for one man's subsistence, is not yet perfect. It is threatened from without by those whom envy renders destructive, and from within by some who cling to passions appropriate to a bygone age.

Canada's Position

Until not so many years ago there was an inclination on the part of other countries to look upon Canada as merely a source of raw materials. Today Canada is an industrial country, culturally eminent and soundly progressive.

It is eighty-five years since our loose provinces were gathered together by Confederation. In that time we have broken through frontiers of geography and climate and philosophy and custom to reach our present position. Today, Canada is leading in attempts to breach old-time prejudice and selfishness and insularity so that world economic reconstruction and stable progress may march side-by-side with political peace.

In his farewell message last February, Governor-General Alexander said this: "Today, with a population of only 14,000,000, Canada is one of the richest countries in the world, and the real development of Canada is only just beginning. If nature has been kind to the Canadian people, nature could not have chosen a finer people upon whom to shower her gifts."

Canadian people have contributed largely to progress, not only of their own country but of the world. Let us look at some of our achievements, recounted in Northern Electric Company's booklet *Forward with Canada*.

Nine years after Confederation Alexander Graham Bell made the world's first long distance telephone call. It was from Brantford to Paris, Ontario, and the quotation was from Hamlet's soliloquy: "To be or not to be."

John Wright of Toronto devised the first trolley pole, making the electric street car practicable. Robert Foulis, of Saint John, N.B., invented the steam fog horn. Dr. William Saunders and his son Charles developed Marquis wheat, opening up a whole new land to wheat growing. Insulin was found by Dr. Frederick Banting and Charles Best, and the Banting Institute conquered silicosis, the "dust disease" which took so heavy a toll of life among miners. The electron microscope, which can magnify a human hair to the size of a telegraph pole, was built by Professor Burton, James Hillier and Albert Prebus. And, adding glamour to science and writing "finish" to centuries of adventurous exploration, Sergeant Henry Larsen of the R.C.M.P. and his crew sailed the Northwest Passage for the first time from west to east.

Canada Economically

When Canada's first census was taken in 1666 to measure the advancement made by this French colony since the founding of Quebec by Champlain 58 years earlier, it was found that there were 3,215 inhabitants. Two hundred years later we had nearly 3½ million. And last year's census recorded 14,009,429 people.

Like newly opened countries everywhere, Canada was at first agricultural, supplemented by pioneer mills and factories. Industrialization as we know it today began with the capital inflow of 1900-1913, mainly from Great Britain, and of 1920-1929, mainly from the United States. Since the end of World War II, domestic and foreign capital have joined to usher in what appears to be a new era of rapid and extensive industrialization.

It is easy to show Canada's industrial progress statistically. Our gross national product at market prices grew from \$5,956 million in 1929 to \$18,122 million in 1950 and an estimated \$21,241 million last year. In 1920, agricultural production represented 41.3 per cent of the net value of all production, and manufacturing was only 32.7 per cent. By 1948 agriculture had declined to 21.5 per cent of the total net value of production, against 53.1 per cent for manufacturing.

But statistics are not everything. Canadians are not seeking a mechanical utopia. The ideal they have is a country developed by its people, using all that science can give them as an aid, but keeping their roots firmly grounded in the rich cultural heritage of the past.

Canada does not dominate the physical world by her economic strength, her armed might, or her population figures, but in the world of ideas, of humanity and of graceful living she may hope to continue second to no country on earth.

Dangers in Progress

There are, of course, dangers in progress. Progress isn't altogether good for us, because it makes things so easy. If the blessings of civilization are greater, the possible disasters are also greater. It all depends upon how we conduct ourselves in this new environment. A scientist said woefully not long ago: "The superman built the airplane, but the ape-man got hold of it."

Something entirely different from technical progress is needed to make sure that the large unit which now comprises humanity shall not blow itself up. Our social units have been growing: from the family to tribe; from tribe to nation; from nation to United Nations. The thinking we do needs to be on a similarly widening scale.

Dictatorship, which seems to some to be an easy way out of national difficulties, used to be of a benevolent, family-head, sort; today it entails the most widespread physical suffering imaginable and the suppression of mind and spirit.

We thought that we had buried insane dictatorship ideas in the ruins of the bunker beneath the Chancellery in Berlin. No hypothesis was more baseless and none more futile than that founded upon the idea of dictatorship, an idea which promised progress and brought about pandemonium. But the infection of this dreadful idea has spread over half Europe.

People of the western world say they are ready to die for the sake of liberty from dictatorship. What they really mean is that they will give up anything except the sort of life that liberty makes possible. They have done great things in freedom which they could not have done in bondage.

Liberty is not a thing in itself; only a door opened. The western world passed through that door and found an opportunity to build a way of life free from

hunger and hardship, abounding in opportunity and happiness. Today, this civilization is the target for alien agitation.

About Utopia

Instead of escaping into dictatorship from the freedom and responsibility of democracy, some people are hoping for utopia. To some it is like the simple time of their youth, when they walked two miles to the old swimming hole and thought nothing of it, and a logging bee or a threshing bee or a sugaring-off was a great event. To others it is a dream castle out of a fairy tale, but with modern comforts.

The search for a readymade Utopia has always ended in disappointment and disillusionment. Utopia, like every other city and state, has to be built, and who is to build it except us? Building means work, and whatever utopia we reach will be built by ourselves. We cannot find in the prospect of some distant tomorrow any, even faint, justification for laziness or do-nothingism today.

No matter where we are going, we are always starting from where we are now.

We are weak only when we do nothing. "It is destiny" is the phrase of a weak heart, the dark apology for error. We are dishonest with ourselves if we leave to chance what we could influence for good.

To rise over the disappointment of a moment is one of the signs of our progress toward maturity. An assistant found Thomas Edison one morning at 2 o'clock, wreathed in smiles. Expecting that Edison had solved the problem in research he had been carrying on for years, the assistant said: "You've solved it; you've found the answer?" And Edison said: "Not a blamed thing works; now I can start over again." When Sir Isaac Newton's dog upset a flaming taper and burned the laborious calculations of years, Sir Isaac set calmly to work to reproduce the material.

Our Multiplying Wants

One of the strangest disparities of history lies between the sense of abundance felt by older and simpler societies and the sense of scarcity felt by ostensibly richer societies of today. The poverty-stricken African natives in C.S. Forester's *The Sky and the Forest* were contented because they knew of no other existence, no other tribe.

But every new thing we see, and every satisfaction we attain, sows the seeds of new desires. We are bundles of an infinite number of insatiable wants.

Of late years, some political thinking has been to the effect that the providing of the adjuncts of satisfactory living has been lagging behind the people's wants. The truth is that people's wants, including greater leisure time, have been expanding too fast for the corresponding economic facilities to supply them.

We may not subscribe wholly to the Yoga ideal that true wisdom does not consist in increasing our wants, but in reducing our needs, but there is an

element of useful advice in it. There are occasions when there is more pleasure in desiring and not possessing than in possessing and not desiring.

Human Qualities

Fortunately, there is something more than mere wanting deep down in human nature. It is the urge to improve, the urge to improve our physical environment, to improve ourselves intellectually, and then to improve emotionally and spiritually.

Every advance we make in skill and power gives us a clearer vision of higher things still to be attained. No matter how low in the scale of humanity he may have been, man has never yet been found destitute of a clearly recognizable something which gives him the power of improvement. He is a progressive animal.

All is not plain sailing, however. Human life is made up of continuous adjustment of internal relations to external relations, and this is not so easy to master as the adjustment of physical things to physical things.

We still have to learn in all its meanings that we must not interfere with other people's ways of being happy, if those ways do not collide too violently with ours. The people around us are just as inevitable in the scheme of things as we are, have just as much right to be themselves, are precisely our equals in the face of nature, are entitled to the same latitude as we demand for ourselves, and are no more responsible for their makeup and environment than we are for ours.

Progress is being made in this social sense. Men are all the time rising on stepping-stones of their dead selves to new visions of human greatness and goodness. Having adjusted ourselves and our behaviour to our environment as it is; having learned its laws and peculiarities, we may then set ourselves to change the world around us to suit our needs, or else, if we cannot do so, to change ourselves to fit the new situation as it is.

This is expressed pithily in a little prayer that is so full of wisdom as to contain a whole philosophy within itself: Grant me the serenity to accept things I cannot change; courage to change things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.

Social Advancement

No one lives fully who does not share, in a way suited to him, in all the activities that go to the making of the best life. This sharing starts in the family, continues through school into economic participation, and then into social and community work.

Civilization came into being through two things chiefly: the home, which developed the social feeling that is the cement of society, and agriculture, which took man from his wandering life and settled him in one place so that he could build schools, churches and the other institutions that go to make up a cultured way of life.

Another step is now needed. Our society must be accommodated to the complexities which have followed in the train of progress. That means association and co-operation on a wider scale than has been necessary in home and community and nation, but of the same nature.

Some things we have already done. Association and co-operation made possible commerce between country and city, between province and province, between nation and nation; co-operative action gave us law under which men may move freely and safely; association has taught us the need for equality in seeking liberty and happiness.

Achievement of these things by association with one another has set free our mental power to roll back the veil of ignorance which hid all but a small part of the globe from men's knowledge. It has opened up the mysteries of chemistry and physics and harnessed in our service physical forces beside which all the energy of mankind is puny.

Our Way of Life

Canadians are convinced that their way of life is superior to that of others. But a way of life cannot continue successfully so long as it is a mere intellectual conviction; it needs to be deeply felt, and deeply believed. It is false and misleading to present our way of life as something charming and popular and easy.

Civilization stands for something quite apart from telephones and washing machines and electric lights. It is a matter of imponderables, of delight in things of the mind, of love of beauty, of honour, of grace and of things of the spirit.

Ours is not a perfect way of life, but it is on the whole better than that of the past and it has a forward-looking pattern.

It provides for more people than any previous period health rather than sickness, a meal when they are hungry, rest when they are tired, shelter from the weather, leisure to contemplate, sympathy and love and fulfilment of purpose.

The greatest failure in our way of life would be to consider it as something complete. At this stage on our road, infinite vistas stretch before us. If we have lost it, we must regain the sense of standing on the threshold of a new historical dispensation. We see infinite fields of knowledge yet to be explored, possibilities yet untouched arising from our wondrous inventions, and the opportunity to put all this knowledge and all these technological discoveries to work together for enlargement of our way of life.

Looking backward, we can picture the birth of the world, the coming of man, the growth of civilization. Looking at today, we sense the value of human freedom, the achievements of science and art, the profusion of material things to make people happy. Looking to the future, we hear a music swelling from innumerable voices, music which is not a dirge but a song of life abounding and triumphant.