MUTUAL AID

A FACTOR OF EVOLUTION

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INTRODUCTION

Two aspects of animal life impressed me most during the journeys which I made in my youth in Eastern Siberia and Northern Manchuria. One of them was the extreme severity of the struggle for existence which most species of animals have to carry on against an inclement Nature; the enormous destruction of life which periodically results from natural agencies; and the consequent paucity of life over the vast territory which fell under my observation. And the other was, that even in those few spots where animal life teemed in abundance, I failed to find—although I was eagerly looking for it—that bitter struggle for the means of existence, *among animals belonging to the same species*, which was considered by most Darwinists (though not always by Darwin himself) as the dominant characteristic of struggle for life, and the main factor of evolution.

The terrible snow-storms which sweep over the northern portion of Eurasia in the later part of the winter, and the glazed frost that often follows them; the frosts and the snow-storms which return every year in the second half of May, when the trees are already in full blossom and insect life swarms everywhere; the early frosts and, occasionally, the heavy snowfalls in July and August, which suddenly destroy myriads of insects, as well as the second broods of the birds in the prairies; the torrential rains, due to the monsoons,

which fall in more temperate regions in August and September—resulting in inundations on a scale which is only known in America and in Eastern Asia, and swamping, on the plateaus, areas as wide as European States; and finally, the heavy snowfalls, early in October, which eventually render a territory as large as France and Germany, absolutely impracticable for ruminants, and destroy them by the thousand—these were the conditions under which I saw animal life struggling in Northern Asia. They made me realize at an early date the overwhelming importance in Nature of what Darwin described as "the natural checks to over-multiplication," in comparison to the struggle between individuals of the same species for the means of subsistence, which may go on here and there, to some limited extent, but never attains the importance of the former. Paucity of life, under-population—not over-population—being the distinctive feature of that immense part of the globe which we name Northern Asia, I conceived since then serious doubts—which subsequent study has only confirmed—as to the reality of that fearful competition for food and life within each species, which was an article of faith with most Darwinists, and, consequently, as to the dominant part which this sort of competition was supposed to play in the evolution of new species.

On the other hand, wherever I saw animal life in abundance, as, for instance, on the lakes where scores of species and millions of individuals came together to rear their progeny; in the colonies of rodents; in the migrations of birds which took place at that time on a truly American scale along the Usuri; and especially in a migration of fallow-deer which I witnessed on the Amur, and during which scores of

thousands of these intelligent animals came together from an immense territory, flying before the coming deep snow, in order to cross the Amur where it is narrowest—in all these scenes of animal life which passed before my eyes, I saw Mutual Aid and Mutual Support carried on to an extent which made me suspect in it a feature of the greatest importance for the maintenance of life, the preservation of each species, and its further evolution.

And finally, I saw among the semi-wild cattle and horses in Transbaikalia, among the wild ruminants everywhere, the squirrels, and so on, that when animals have to struggle against scarcity of food, in consequence of one of the above-mentioned causes, the whole of that portion of the species which is affected by the calamity, comes out of the ordeal so much impoverished in vigour and health, that *no progressive evolution of the species can be based upon such periods of keen competition.*

Consequently, when my attention was drawn, later on, to the relations between Darwinism and Sociology, I could agree with none of the works and pamphlets that had been written upon this important subject. They all endeavoured to prove that Man, owing to his higher intelligence and knowledge, *may* mitigate the harshness of the struggle for life between men; but they all recognized at the same time that the struggle for the means of existence, of every animal against all its congeners, and of every man against all other men, was "a law of Nature." This view, however, I could not accept, because I was persuaded that to admit a pitiless inner war for life within each species, and to see in that war a condition of progress, was to admit something which not only

had not yet been proved, but also lacked confirmation from direct observation.

On the contrary, a lecture "On the Law of Mutual Aid," which was delivered at a Russian Congress of Naturalists, in January 1880, by the well-known zoologist, Professor Kessler, the then Dean of the St. Petersburg University, struck me as throwing a new light on the whole subject. Kessler's idea was, that besides the *law of Mutual Struggle* there is in Nature *the law of Mutual Aid*, which, for the success of the struggle for life, and especially for the progressive evolution of the species, is far more important than the law of mutual contest. This suggestion—which was, in reality, nothing but a further development of the ideas expressed by Darwin himself in *The Descent of Man*—seemed to me so correct and of so great an importance, that since I became acquainted with it (in 1883) I began to collect materials for further developing the idea, which Kessler had only cursorily sketched in his lecture, but had not lived to develop. He died in 1881.

In one point only I could not entirely endorse Kessler's views. Kessler alluded to "parental feeling" and care for progeny (see below, Chapter I.) as to the source of mutual inclinations in animals. However, to determine how far these two feelings have really been at work in the evolution of sociable instincts, and how far other instincts have been at work in the same direction, seems to me a quite distinct and a very wide question, which we hardly can discuss yet. It will be only after we have well established the facts of mutual aid in different classes of animals, and their importance for evolution, that we shall be able to study what belongs in the evolution of sociable

feelings, to parental feelings, and what to sociability proper—the latter having evidently its origin at the earliest stages of the evolution of the animal world, perhaps even at the "colony-stages." I consequently directed my chief attention to establishing first of all, the importance of the Mutual Aid factor of evolution, leaving to ulterior research the task of discovering the *origin* of the Mutual Aid instinct in Nature.

The importance of the Mutual Aid factor—"if its generality could only be demonstrated"—did not escape the naturalist's genius so manifest in Goethe. When Eckermann told once to Goethe—it was in 1827—that two little wren-fledglings, which had run away from him, were found by him next day in a nest of robin redbreasts (*Rothkehlchen*), which fed the little ones, together with their own youngsters, Goethe grew quite excited about this fact. He saw in it a confirmation of his pantheistic views, and said:—"If it be true that this feeding of a stranger goes through all Nature as something having the character of a general law—then many an enigma would be solved." He returned to this matter on the next day, and most earnestly entreated Eckermann (who was, as is known, a zoologist) to make a special study of the subject, adding that he would surely come "to quite invaluable treasuries of results" (*Gespräche*, edition of 1848, vol. iii. pp. 219, 221). Unfortunately, this study was never made, although it is very possible that Brehm, who has accumulated in his works such rich materials relative to mutual aid among animals, might have been inspired by Goethe's remark.

Several works of importance were published in the years 1872–1886, dealing with the intelligence and the mental life of animals (they are mentioned in a

footnote in Chapter I. of this book), and three of them dealt more especially with the subject under consideration; namely, *Les Sociétés animales*, by Espinas (Paris, 1877); *La Lutte pour l'existence et l'association pour la lutte*, a lecture by J. L. Lanessan (April 1881); and Louis Büchner's book, *Liebe und Liebes-Leben in der Thierwelt*, of which the first edition appeared in 1882 or 1883, and a second, much enlarged, in 1885. But excellent though each of these works is, they leave ample room for a work in which Mutual Aid would be considered, not only as an argument in favour of a pre-human origin of moral instincts, but also as a law of Nature and a factor of evolution. Espinas devoted his main attention to such animal societies (ants, bees) as are established upon a physiological division of labour, and though his work is full of admirable hints in all possible directions, it was written at a time when the evolution of human societies could not yet be treated with the knowledge we now possess. Lanessan's lecture has more the character of a brilliantly-laid-out general plan of a work, in which mutual support would be dealt with, beginning with rocks in the sea, and then passing in review the world of plants, of animals and men. As to Büchner's work, suggestive though it is and rich in facts, I could not agree with its leading idea. The book begins with a hymn to Love, and nearly all its illustrations are intended to prove the existence of love and sympathy among animals. However, to reduce animal sociability to *love* and *sympathy* means to reduce its generality and its importance, just as human ethics based upon love and personal sympathy only have contributed to narrow the comprehension of the moral feeling as a whole.

It is not love to my neighbour—whom I often do not know at all—which induces me to seize a pail of water and to rush towards his house when I see it on fire; it is a far wider, even though more vague feeling or instinct of human solidarity and sociability which moves me. So it is also with animals. It is not love, and not even sympathy (understood in its proper sense) which induces a herd of ruminants or of horses to form a ring in order to resist an attack of wolves; not love which induces wolves to form a pack for hunting; not love which induces kittens or lambs to play, or a dozen of species of young birds to spend their days together in the autumn; and it is neither love nor personal sympathy which induces many thousand fallow-deer scattered over a territory as large as France to form into a score of separate herds, all marching towards a given spot, in order to cross there a river. It is a feeling infinitely wider than love or personal sympathy—an instinct that has been slowly developed among animals and men in the course of an extremely long evolution, and which has taught animals and men alike the force they can borrow from the practice of mutual aid and support, and the joys they can find in social life.

The importance of this distinction will be easily appreciated by the student of animal psychology, and the more so by the student of human ethics. Love, sympathy and self-sacrifice certainly play an immense part in the progressive development of our moral feelings. But it is not love and not even sympathy upon which Society is based in mankind. It is the conscience—be it only at the stage of an instinct—of human solidarity. It is the unconscious recognition of the force that is borrowed by each man from the

practice of mutual aid; of the close dependency of every one's happiness upon the happiness of all; and of the sense of justice, or equity, which brings the individual to consider the rights of every other individual as equal to his own. Upon this broad and necessary foundation the still higher moral feelings are developed. But this subject lies outside the scope of the present work, and I shall only indicate here a lecture, "Justice and Morality," which I delivered in reply to Huxley's *Ethics*, and in which the subject has been treated at some length.

Consequently I thought that a book, written on *Mutual Aid as a Law of Nature and a factor of evolution*, might fill an important gap. When Huxley issued, in 1888, his "Struggle-for-life" manifesto (*Struggle for Existence and its Bearing upon Man*), which to my appreciation was a very incorrect representation of the facts of Nature, as one sees them in the bush and in the forest, I communicated with the editor of the *Nineteenth Century*, asking him whether he would give the hospitality of his review to an elaborate reply to the views of one of the most prominent Darwinists; and Mr. James Knowles received the proposal with fullest sympathy. I also spoke of it to W. Bates. "Yes, certainly; *that* is true Darwinism," was his reply. "It is horrible what 'they' have made of Darwin. Write these articles, and when they are printed, I will write to you a letter which you may publish." Unfortunately, it took me nearly seven years to write these articles, and when the last was published, Bates was no longer living.

After having discussed the importance of mutual aid in various classes of animals, I was evidently bound to discuss the importance of the same factor in the evolu-

tion of Man. This was the more necessary as there are a number of evolutionists who may not refuse to admit the importance of mutual aid among animals, but who, like Herbert Spencer, will refuse to admit it for Man. For primitive Man—they maintain—war of each against all was *the* law of life. In how far this assertion, which has been too willingly repeated, without sufficient criticism, since the times of Hobbes, is supported by what we know about the early phases of human development, is discussed in the chapters given to the Savages and the Barbarians.

The number and importance of mutual-aid institutions which were developed by the creative genius of the savage and half-savage masses, during the earliest clan-period of mankind and still more during the next village-community period, and the immense influence which these early institutions have exercised upon the subsequent development of mankind, down to the present times, induced me to extend my researches to the later, historical periods as well; especially, to study that most interesting period—the free mediæval city-republics, of which the universality and influence upon our modern civilization have not yet been duly appreciated. And finally, I have tried to indicate in brief the immense importance which the mutual-support instincts, inherited by mankind from its extremely long evolution, play even now in our modern society, which is supposed to rest upon the principle: "every one for himself, and the State for all," but which it never has succeeded, nor will succeed in realizing.

It may be objected to this book that both animals and men are represented in it under too favourable an aspect; that their sociable qualities are insisted upon, while their anti-social and self-asserting instincts are

hardly touched upon. This was, however, unavoidable. We have heard so much lately of the "harsh, pitiless struggle for life," which was said to be carried on by every animal against all other animals, every "savage" against all other "savages," and every civilized man against all his co-citizens—and these assertions have so much become an article of faith—that it was necessary, first of all, to oppose to them a wide series of facts showing animal and human life under a quite different aspect. It was necessary to indicate the overwhelming importance which sociable habits play in Nature and in the progressive evolution of both the animal species and human beings: to prove that they secure to animals a better protection from their enemies, very often facilities for getting food (winter provisions, migrations, etc.), longevity, and therefore a greater facility for the development of intellectual faculties; and that they have given to men, in addition to the same advantages, the possibility of working out those institutions which have enabled mankind to survive in its hard struggle against Nature, and to progress, notwithstanding all the vicissitudes of its history. It is a book on the law of Mutual Aid, viewed at as one of the chief factors of evolution—not on *all* factors of evolution and their respective values; and this first book had to be written, before the latter could become possible.

I should certainly be the last to underrate the part which the self-assertion of the individual has played in the evolution of mankind. However, this subject requires, I believe, a much deeper treatment than the one it has hitherto received. In the history of mankind, individual self-assertion has often been, and continually is, something quite different from, and far

larger and deeper than, the petty, unintelligent narrow-mindedness, which, with a large class of writers, goes for "individualism" and "self-assertion." Nor have history-making individuals been limited to those whom historians have represented as heroes. My intention, consequently, is, if circumstances permit it, to discuss separately the part taken by the self-assertion of the individual in the progressive evolution of mankind. I can only make in this place the following general remark:—When the Mutual Aid institutions—the tribe, the village community, the guilds, the mediæval city—began, in the course of history, to lose their primitive character, to be invaded by parasitic growths, and thus to become hindrances to progress, the revolt of individuals against these institutions took always two different aspects. Part of those who rose up strove to purify the old institutions, or to work out a higher form of commonwealth, based upon the same Mutual Aid principles; they tried, for instance, to introduce the principle of "compensation," instead of the *lex talionis*, and later on, the pardon of offences, or a still higher ideal of equality before the human conscience, *in lieu* of "compensation," according to class-value. But at the very same time, another portion of the same individual rebels endeavoured to break down the protective institutions of mutual support, with no other intention but to increase their own wealth and their own powers. In this three-cornered contest, between the two classes of revolted individuals and the supporters of what existed, lies the real tragedy of history. But to delineate that contest, and honestly to study the part played in the evolution of mankind by each one of these three forces, would require at least as many years as it took me to write this book.

Of works dealing with nearly the same subject which have been published since the publication of my articles on Mutual Aid among Animals, I must mention *The Lowell Lectures on the Ascent of Man*, by Henry Drummond (London, 1894), and *The Origin and Growth of the Moral Instinct*, by A. Sutherland (London, 1898). Both are constructed chiefly on the lines taken in Büchner's *Love*, and in the second work the parental and familial feeling as the sole influence at work in the development of the moral feelings has been dealt with at some length. A third work dealing with man and written on similar lines is *The Principles of Sociology*, by Prof. F. A. Giddings, the first edition of which was published in 1896 at New York and London, and the leading ideas of which were sketched by the author in a pamphlet in 1894. I must leave, however, to literary critics the task of discussing the points of contact, resemblance, or divergence between these works and mine.

The different chapters of this book were published first in the *Nineteenth Century* ("Mutual Aid among Animals," in September and November 1890; "Mutual Aid among Savages," in April 1891; "Mutual Aid among the Barbarians," in January 1892; "Mutual Aid in the Mediæval City," in August and September 1894; and "Mutual Aid amongst Modern Men," in January and June 1896). In bringing them out in a book form my first intention was to embody in an Appendix the mass of materials, as well as the discussion of several secondary points, which had to be omitted in the review articles. It appeared, however, that the Appendix would double the size of the book, and I was compelled to abandon, or, at least, to postpone its publication. The present

Appendix includes the discussion of only a few points which have been the matter of scientific controversy during the last few years; and into the text I have introduced only such matter as could be introduced without altering the structure of the work.

I am glad of this opportunity for expressing to the editor of the *Nineteenth Century*, Mr. James Knowles, my very best thanks, both for the kind hospitality which he offered to these papers in his review, as soon as he knew their general idea, and the permission he kindly gave me to reprint them.

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