

CHAPTER XVIII

BEYOND MAN

IT seems to me a lecturer's duty to speak to you about any remarkable thought at this moment engaging the attention of western philosophers and men of science,—partly because any such new ideas are certain, sooner or later, to be reflected in literature, and partly because without a knowledge of them you might form incorrect ideas in relation to utterances of any important philosophic character. I am not going to discourse about Nietzsche, though the title of this lecture is taken from one of his books; the ideas about which I am going to tell you, you will not find in his books. It is most extraordinary, to my thinking, that these ideas never occurred to him, for he was an eminent man of science before writing his probably insane books. I have not the slightest sympathy with most of his ideas; they seem to me misinterpretations of evolutionary teachings; and if not misinterpretations, they are simply undeveloped and ill-balanced thinking. But the title of one of his books, and the idea which he tries always unsuccessfully to explain,—that of a state above mankind, a moral condition “beyond man,” as he calls it,—that is worth talking about. It is not nonsense at all, but fact, and I think that I can give you a correct idea of the realities in the case. Leaving Nietzsche entirely alone, then, let us ask if it is possible to suppose a condition of human existence above morality,—that is to say, more moral than the most moral ideal which a human brain can conceive? We may answer, it is quite possible, and it is not only possible, but it has actually been predicted by many great thinkers, including Herbert Spencer.

We have been brought up to think that there can be

nothing better than virtue, than duty, than strictly following the precepts of a good religion. However, our ideas of goodness and of virtue necessarily imply the existence of the opposite qualities. To do a good thing because it is our duty to do it, implies a certain amount of resolve, a struggle against difficulty. The virtue of honesty is a term implying the difficulty of being perfectly honest. When we think of any virtuous or great deed, we cannot help thinking of the pain and obstacles that have to be met with in performing that deed. All our active morality is a struggle against immorality. And I think that, as every religion teaches, it must be granted that no human being has a perfectly moral nature.

Could a world exist in which the nature of all the inhabitants would be so moral that the mere idea of what is immoral could not exist? Let me explain my question more in detail. Imagine a society in which the idea of dishonesty would not exist, because no person could be dishonest, a society in which the idea of unchastity could not exist, because no person could possibly be unchaste, a world in which no one could have any idea of envy, ambition or anger, because such passions could not exist, a world in which there would be no idea of duty, filial or parental, because not to be filial, not to be loving, not to do everything which we human beings now call duty, would be impossible. In such a world ideas of duty would be quite useless; for every action of existence would represent the constant and faultless performance of what we term duty. Moreover, there would be no difficulty, no pain in such performance; it would be the constant and unfailing pleasure of life. With us, unfortunately, what is wrong often gives pleasure; and what is good to do, commonly causes pain. But in the world which I am asking you to imagine there could not be any wrong, nor any pleasure in wrong-doing; all the pleasure would be in right-doing. To give a very simple illustration—one of the commonest and most pardonable faults of young people is eating, or drinking, or sleep-

ing too much. But in our imaginary world to eat or to drink or to sleep in even the least degree more than is necessary could not be done; the constitution of the race would not permit it. One more illustration. Our children have to be educated carefully in regard to what is right or wrong; in the world of which I am speaking, no time would be wasted in any such education, for every child would be born with full knowledge of what is right and wrong. Or to state the case in psychological language—I mean the language of scientific, not of metaphysical, psychology—we should have a world in which morality would have been transmitted into inherited instinct. Now again let me put the question: can we imagine such a world? Perhaps you will answer, Yes, in heaven—nowhere else. But I answer you that such a world actually exists, and that it can be studied in almost any part of the East or of Europe by a person of scientific training. The world of insects actually furnishes examples of such a moral transformation. It is for this reason that such writers as Sir John Lubbock and Herbert Spencer have not hesitated to say that certain kinds of social insects have immensely surpassed men, both in social and in ethical progress.

But that is not all that it is necessary to say here. You might think that I am only repeating a kind of parable. The important thing is the opinion of scientific men that humanity will at last, in the course of millions of years, reach the ethical conditions of the ants. It is only five or six years ago that some of these conditions were established by scientific evidence, and I want to speak of them. They have a direct bearing upon important ethical questions; and they have startled the whole moral world, and set men thinking in entirely new directions.

In order to explain how the study of social insects has set moralists of recent years thinking in a new direction, it will be necessary to generalize a great deal in the course of so short a lecture. It is especially the social conditions of the ants which has inspired these new ideas; but you

must not think that any one species of ants furnishes us with all the facts. The facts have been arrived at only through the study of hundreds of different kinds of ants by hundreds of scientific men; and it is only by the consensus of their evidence that we get the ethical picture which I shall try to outline for you. Altogether there are probably about five thousand different species of ants, and these different species represent many different stages of social evolution, from the most primitive and savage up to the most highly civilized and moral. The details of the following picture are furnished by a number of the highest species only; that must not be forgotten. Also, I must remind you that the morality of the ant, by the necessity of circumstance, does not extend beyond the limits of its own species. Impeccably ethical within the community, ants carry on war outside their own borders; were it not for this, we might call them morally perfect creatures.

Although the mind of an ant cannot be at all like the mind of the human being, it is so intelligent that we are justified in trying to describe its existence by a kind of allegorical comparison with human life. Imagine, then, a world full of women, working night and day, — building, tunnelling, bridging, — also engaged in agriculture, in horticulture, and in taking care of many kinds of domestic animals. (I may remark that ants have domesticated no fewer than five hundred and eighty-four different kinds of creatures.) This world of women is scrupulously clean; busy as they are, all of them carry combs and brushes about them, and arrange themselves several times a day. In addition to this constant work, these women have to take care of myriads of children, — children so delicate that the slightest change in the weather may kill them. So the children have to be carried constantly from one place to another in order to keep them warm.

Though this multitude of workers are always gathering food, no one of them would eat or drink a single atom more than is necessary; and none of them would sleep for

one second longer than is necessary. Now comes a surprising fact, about which a great deal must be said later on. These women have no sex. They are women, for they sometimes actually give birth, as virgins, to children; but they are incapable of wedlock. They are more than vestals. Sex is practically suppressed.

This world of workers is protected by an army of soldiers. The soldiers are very large, very strong, and shaped so differently from the working females that they do not seem at first to belong to the same race. They help in the work, though they are not able to help in some delicate kinds of work—they are too clumsy and strong. Now comes the second astonishing fact: these soldiers are all women—amazons, we might call them; but they are sexless women. In these also sex has been suppressed.

You ask, where do the children come from? Most of the children are born of special mothers—females chosen for the purpose of bearing offspring, and not allowed to do anything else. They are treated almost like empresses, being constantly fed and attended and served, and being lodged in the best way possible. Only these can eat and drink at all times—they must do so for the sake of their offspring. They are not suffered to go out, unless strongly attended, and they are not allowed to run any risk of danger or of injury. The life of the whole race circles about them and about their children, but they are very few.

Last of all are the males, the men. One naturally asks why females should have been specialized into soldiers instead of men. It appears that the females have more reserve force, and all the force that might have been utilized in the giving of life has been diverted to the making of aggressive powers. The real males are very small and weak. They appear to be treated with indifference and contempt. They are suffered to become the bridegrooms of one night, after which they die very quickly. By contrast, the lives of the rest are very long. Ants live for at least three or four

years, but the males live only long enough to perform their solitary function.

In the foregoing little fantasy, the one thing that should have most impressed you is the fact of the suppression of sex. But now comes the last and most astonishing fact of all: this suppression of sex is not natural, but artificial—I mean that it is voluntary. It has been discovered that ants are able, by a systematic method of nourishment, to suppress or develop sex as they please. The race has decided that sex shall not be allowed to exist except in just so far as it is absolutely necessary to the existence of the race. Individuals with sex are tolerated only as necessary evils. Here is an instance of the most powerful of all passions voluntarily suppressed for the benefit of the community at large. It vanishes whenever unnecessary; when necessary after a war or a calamity of some kind, it is called into existence again. Certainly it is not wonderful that such a fact should have set moralists thinking. Of course if a human community could discover some secret way of effecting the same object, and could have the courage to do it, or rather the unselfishness to do it, the result would simply be that sexual immorality of any kind would become practically impossible. The very idea of such immorality would cease to exist.

But that is only one fact of self-suppression, and the ant-world furnishes hundreds. To state the whole thing in the simplest possible way, let me say the race has entirely got rid of everything that we call a selfish impulse. Even hunger and thirst allow of no selfish gratification. The entire life of the community is devoted to the common good and to mutual help and to the care of the young. Spencer says it is impossible to imagine that an ant has a sense of duty like our own,—a religion, if you like. But it does not need a sense of duty, it does not need religion. Its life is religion in the practical sense. Probably millions of years ago the ant had feelings much more like our own than it has now. At that time, to perform altruistic actions may

have been painful to the ant; to perform them now has become the one pleasure of its existence. In order to bring up children and serve the state more efficiently these insects have sacrificed their sex and every appetite that we call by the name of animal passion. Moreover they have a perfect community, a society in which nobody could think of property, except as a state affair, a public thing, or as the Romans would say, a *res publica*. In a human community so organized, there could not be ambition, any jealousy, any selfish conduct of any sort—indeed, no selfishness at all. The individual is said to be practically sacrificed for the sake of the race; but such a supposition means the highest moral altruism. Therefore thinkers have to ask, “Will man ever rise to something like the condition of ants?”

Herbert Spencer says that such is the evident tendency. He does not say, nor is it at all probable, that there will be in future humanity such physiological specialization as would correspond to the suppression of sex among ants, or to the bringing of women to the dominant place in the human world, and the masculine sex to an inferior position. That is not likely ever to happen, for reasons which it would take very much too long to speak of now. But there is evidence that the most selfish of all human passions will eventually be brought under control—under such control that the present cause of wellnigh all human suffering, the pressure of population, will be practically removed. And there is psychological evidence that the human mind will undergo such changes that wrong-doing, in the sense of unkindly action, will become almost impossible, and that the highest pleasure will be found not in selfishness but in unselfishness. Of course there are thousands of things to think about, suggested by this discovery of the life of ants. I am only telling the more important ones. What I have told you ought at least to suggest that the idea of a moral condition much higher than all our moral conditions of to-day is quite possible,—that it is not an idea to be laughed at. But it

was not Nietzsche who ever conceived this possibility. His "Beyond Man," and the real and much to be hoped for "beyond man," are absolutely antagonistic conceptions. When the ancient Hebrew writer said, thousands of years ago, "Go to the ant, thou sluggard, consider her ways," he could not have imagined how good his advice would prove in the light of twentieth century science.