

III

THE PROBLEM OF PROGRESS

WHAT constitutes progress? And what is the true criterion for its measurement? In adopting Western methods of life and thought, is Japan advancing or receding? The simplicity of the life of the common people, their freedom from fashions that fetter the Occidental, their independence of furniture in their homes, their few wants and fewer necessities—these, when contrasted with the endless needs and demands of an Occidental, are accepted by some as evidences of a higher stage of civilization than prevails in the West.

The hedonistic criterion of progress is the one most commonly adopted in considering the question as to whether Japan is the gainer or the loser by her rapid abandonment of old ways and ideas and by her equally rapid adoption of Western ones in their place. Yet this appeal to happiness seems to me a misleading because vague, if not altogether false, standard of progress. Those who use it insist that the people of Japan are losing their former happiness under the stress of new conditions. Now there can be no doubt that during the "Kyu-han jidai," the times before the coming in of Western waves of life, the farmers were a simple, unsophisticated people; living from month to month with little thought or anxiety. They may be said to have been happy. The samurai who lived wholly on the bounty of the daimyo led of course a tranquil life, at least so far as anxiety or toil for daily rice and fish was concerned. As the fathers had lived and fought and died, so did the sons. To a large extent the community had all things in common; for although the lord lived in relative luxury, yet in such small communities there never was the great difference between classes that we find in

THE PROBLEM OF PROGRESS 53

modern Europe and America. As a rule the people were fed, if there was food. The socialistic principle was practically universal. Especially was emphasis laid on kinship. As a result, save among the outcast classes, the extremes of poverty did not exist.

Were we to rest our inquiries at this point, we might say that in truth the Japanese had attained the summit of progress; that nothing further could be asked. But pushing our way further, we find that the peace and quiet of the ordinary classes of society were accompanied by many undesirable features.

Prominent among them was the domineering spirit of the military class. They alone laid claim to personal rights, and popular stories are full of the free and furious ways in which they used their swords. The slightest offense by one of the swordless men would be paid for by a summary act of the two-sworded swashbucklers, while beggars and farmers were cut down without compunction, sometimes simply to test a sword. In describing those times one man said to me, "They used to cut off the heads of the common people as farmers cut off the head of the daikon" (a variety of giant radish). I have frequently asked my Japanese friends and acquaintances, whether, in view of the increasing difficulties of life under the new conditions, the country would not like to return to ancient times and customs. But none have been ready to give me an affirmative reply. On detailed questioning I have always found that the surly, domineering methods, the absolutism of the rulers, and the defenselessness of the people against unjust arbitrary superiors would not be submitted to by a people that has once tasted the joy arising from individual rights and freedom and the manhood that comes from just laws for all.

A striking feature of those Japanese who are unchanged by foreign ways is their obsequious manner toward superiors and officials. The lordly and oftentimes ruthless manner of the rulers has naturally cowed the subject. Whenever the higher nobility traveled, the common people were commanded to fall on the ground in obeisance and homage. Failure to do so was pun-

ishable with instant death at the hands of the retainers who accompanied the lord. During my first stay in Kumamoto I was surprised that farmers, coming in from the country on horseback, meeting me as I walked, invariably got down from their horses, unfastened the handkerchiefs from their heads, and even took off their spectacles if there were nothing else removable. These were signs of respect given to all in authority. When my real status began to be generally known, these signs of politeness gave place to rude staring. It is difficult for the foreigner to appreciate the extremes of the high-handed and the obsequious spirit which were developed by the ancient form of government. Yet it is comparatively easy to distinguish between the evidently genuine humility of the non-military classes and the studied deference of the dominant samurai.

Another feature of the old order of things was the emptiness of the lives of the people. Education was rare. Limited to the samurai, who composed but a fraction of the population, it was by no means universal even among them. And such education as they had was confined to the Chinese classics. Although there were schools in connection with some of the temples, the people as a whole did not learn to read or write. These were accomplishments for the nobility and men of leisure. The thoughts of the people were circumscribed by the narrow world in which they lived, and this allowed but an occasional glimpse of other clans through war or a chance traveler. For, in those times, freedom of travel was not generally allowed. Each man, as a rule, lived and labored and died where he was born. The military classes had more freedom. But when we contrast the breadth of thought and outlook enjoyed by the nation to-day, through newspapers and magazines, with the outlook and knowledge of even the most progressive and learned of those of ancient times, how contracted do their lives appear!

A third feature of former times is the condition of women during those ages. Eulogizers of Old Japan not only seem to forget that working classes existed then, but also that women, constituting half the popula-

tion, were essential to the existence of the nation. Though allowing more freedom than was given to women in other Oriental nations, Japan did not grant such liberty as is essential to the full development of her powers. "Woman is a man's plaything" expresses a view still held in Japan. "Woman's sole duty is the bearing and rearing of children for her husband" is the dominant idea that has determined her place in the family and in the state for hundreds of years. That she has any independent interest or value as a human being has not entered into national conception. "The way in which they are treated by the men has hitherto been such as might cause a pang to any generous European heart. . . A woman's lot is summed up in what is termed 'the three obediences,' obedience, while yet unmarried, to a father; obedience, when married, to a husband; obedience, when widowed, to a son. At the present moment the greatest duchess or marchioness in the land is still her husband's drudge. She fetches and carries for him, bows down humbly in the hall when my lord sallies forth on his good pleasure."* "The Greater Learning for Women," by Ekken Kaibara (1630-1714), an eminent Japanese moralist, is the name of a treatise on woman's duties which sums up the ideas common in Japan upon this subject. For two hundred years or more it has been used as a text-book in the training of girls. It enjoins such abject submission of the wife to her husband, to her parents-in-law, and to her other kindred by marriage, as no self-respecting woman of Western lands could for a moment endure. Let me prove this through a few quotations.

"A woman should look on her husband as if he were Heaven itself and never weary of thinking how she may yield to her husband, and thus escape celestial castigation." "Woman must form no friendships and no intimacy, except when ordered to do so by her parents or by the middleman. Even at the peril of her life, must she harden her heart like a rock or metal, and observe the rules of propriety." "A woman has no particular lord. She must look to her husband as her lord and

* Prof. B. H. Chamberlain.

must serve him with all reverence and worship, not despising or thinking lightly of him. The great life-long duty of a woman is obedience. . . . When the husband issues his instructions, the wife must never disobey them. . . . Should her husband be roused to anger at any time, she must obey him, with fear and trembling." Not one word in all these many and specific instructions hints at love and affection. That which to Western ears is the sweetest word in the English language, the foundation of happiness in the home, the only true bond between husband and wife, parents and children—LOVE—does not once appear in this the ideal instruction for Japanese women.

Even to this day divorce is the common occurrence in Japan. According to Confucius there are seven grounds of divorce: disobedience, barrenness, lewd conduct, jealousy, leprosy or any other foul or incurable disease, too much talking, and thievishness. "In plain English, a man may send away his wife whenever he gets tired of her."

Were the man's duties to the wife and to her parents as minutely described and insisted on as are those of the wife to the husband and to his parents, this "Greater Learning for Women" would not seem so deficient; but such is not the case. The woman's rights are few, yet she bears her lot with marvelous patience. Indeed, she has acquired a most attractive and patient and modest behavior despite, or is it because of, centuries of well-nigh tyrannical treatment from the male sex. In some important respects the women of Japan are not to be excelled by those of any other land. But that this lot has been a happy one I cannot conceive it possible for a European, who knows the meaning of love or home, to contend. The single item of one divorce for every three marriages tells a tale of sorrow and heartache that is sad to contemplate. Nor does this include those separations where tentative marriage takes place with a view to learning whether the parties can endure living together. I have known several such cases. Neither does this take account of the great number of concubines that may be found in the homes of the higher

classes. A concubine often makes formal divorce quite superfluous.

I by no means contend that the women of Old Japan were all and always miserable. There was doubtless much happiness and even family joy; affection between husband and wife could assuredly have been found in numberless cases. But the hardness of life as a whole, the low position held by woman in her relations to man, her lack of legal rights,* and her menial position, justify the assertion that there was much room for improvement.

These three conspicuous features of the older life in Japan help us to reach a clear conception as to what constitutes progress. We may say that true progress consists in that continuous, though slow, transformation of the structure of society which, while securing its more thorough organization, brings to each individual the opportunity of a larger, richer, and fuller life, a life which increasingly calls forth his latent powers and capacities. In other words, progress is a growing organization of society, accompanied by a growing liberty of the individual resulting in richness and fullness of life. It is not primarily a question of unreflecting happiness, but a question of the wide development of manhood and womanhood. Both men and women have as yet unmeasured latent capacities, which demand a certain liberty, accompanied by responsibilities and cares, in order for their development. Intellectual education and a wide horizon are likewise essential to the production of such manhood and womanhood. In the long run this is seen to bring a deeper and a more lasting happiness than was possible to the undeveloped man or woman.

The question of progress is confused and put on a wrong footing when the consciousness of happiness or unhappiness is made the primary test. The happiness of the child is quite apart from that of the adult. Regardless of distressing circumstances, the child is able to laugh and play, and this because he is a child; a child

*Only since the coming of the new period has it become possible for a woman to gain a divorce from her husband.

in his ignorance of actual life, and in his inability to perceive the true conditions in which he lives. Not otherwise, I take it, was the happiness of the vast majority in Old Japan. Theirs was the happiness of ignorance and simple, undeveloped lives. Accustomed to tyranny, they did not think of rebellion against it. Familiar with brutality and suffering, they felt nothing of its shame and inhumanity. The sight of decapitated bodies, the torture of criminals, the despotism of husbands, the cringing obedience of the ruled, the haughtiness of the rulers, the life of hard toil and narrow outlook, were all so usual that no thought of escape from such an order of society ever suggested itself to those who endured it.

From time to time wise and just rulers did indeed strive to introduce principles of righteousness into their methods of government; but these men formed the exception, not the rule. They were individuals and not the system under which the people lived. It was always a matter of chance whether or not such men were at the head of affairs, for the people did not dream of the possibility of having any voice in their selection. The structure of society was and always had been absolute militarism. Even under the most benevolent rulers the use of cruel torture, not only on convicted criminals, but on all suspected of crime, was customary. Those in authority might personally set a good example, but they did not modify the system. They owned not only the soil but practically the laborers also, for these could not leave their homes in search of others that were better. They were serfs, if not slaves, and the system did not tend to raise the standard of life or education, of manhood or womanhood among the people. The happiness of the people in such times was due in part to their essential inhumanity of heart and lack of sympathy with suffering and sorrow. Each individual bore his own sorrow and pain alone. The community, as such, did not distress itself over individuals who suffered. Sympathy, in its full meaning, was unknown in Old Japan. The barbarous custom of casting out the leper from the home, to wander a lonely exile, living on the charity of

strangers, is not unknown even to this day. We are told that in past times the "people were governed by such strong aversion to the sight of sickness that travelers were often left to die by the roadside from thirst, hunger, or disease; and householders even went the length of thrusting out of doors and abandoning to utter destitution servants who suffered from chronic maladies." So universal was this heartlessness that the government at one time issued proclamations against the practices it allowed. "Whenever an epidemic occurred the number of deaths was enormous." Seven men of the outcast, "the Eta," class were authoritatively declared equal in value to one common man. Beggars were technically called "hi-nin," "not men."

Those who descant on the happiness of Old Japan commit the great error of overlooking all these sad features of life, and of fixing their attention exclusively on the one feature of the childlike, not to say childish, lightness of heart of the common people. Such writers are thus led to pronounce the past better than the present time. They also overlook the profound happiness and widespread prosperity of the present era. Trade, commerce, manufactures, travel, the freest of intercommunication, newspapers, and international relations, have brought into life a richness and a fullness that were then unknown. But in addition, the people now enjoy a security of personal interests, a possession of personal rights and property, and a personal liberty, that make life far more worthy and profoundly enjoyable, even while they bring responsibilities and duties and not a few anxieties. This explains the fact that no Japanese has expressed to me the slightest desire to abandon the present and return to the life and conditions of Old Japan.

Let me repeat, therefore, with all possible emphasis, that the problem of progress is not primarily one of increasing light-heartedness, pure and simple, nor yet a problem of racial unification or of political centralization; it is rather a problem of so developing the structure of society that the individual may have the fullest opportunity for development.

The measure of progress is not the degree of racial unification, of political centralization, or of unreflective happiness, but rather the degree and the extent of individual personality. Racial unification, political centralization, and increasing happiness are in the attainment of progress, but they are not to be viewed as sufficient ends. Personality can alone be that end. The wide development of personality, therefore, is at once the goal and the criterion of progress.

IV

THE METHOD OF PROGRESS

PROGRESS as an ideal is quite modern in its origin. For although the ancients were progressing, they did it unconsciously, blindly, stumbling on it by chance, forced to it, as we have seen, by the struggle for existence. True of the ancient civilizations of Europe and Western Asia and Africa, this is emphatically true of the Orient. Here, so far from seeking to progress, the avowed aim has been not to progress; the set purpose has been to do as the fathers did; to follow their example even in customs and rites whose meaning has been lost in the obscurity of the past. This blind adherence was the boast of those who called themselves religious. They strove to fulfill their duties to their ancestors.

Under such conditions how was progress possible? And how has it come to pass that, ruled by this ideal until less than fifty years ago, Japan is now facing quite the other way? The passion of the nation to-day is to make the greatest possible progress in every direction. Here is an anomaly, a paradox; progress made in spite of its rejection; and, recently, a total volte-face. How shall we explain this paradox?

In our chapter on the Principles of National Evolution,* we see that the first step in progress was made through the development of enlarging communities by means of extending boundaries and hardening customs. We see that, on reaching this stage, the great problem was so to break the "cake of custom" as to give liberty to individuals whereby to secure the needful variations. We do not consider how this was to be accomplished. We merely show that, if further progress was to be

*Chapter xxix. Some may care to read this chapter at this point.