

Mutual Aid: A Factor in Evolution, 1902

When the present war began, involving nearly all Europe in a terrible struggle, and this struggle assumed, in those parts of Belgium and France which were invaded by the Germans, a never yet known character of wholesale destruction of life among the non-combatants and pillage of the means of subsistence of the civil population, "struggle for existence" became a favourite explanation with those who tried to find an excuse for these horrors.

A protest against such an abuse of Darwin's terminology appeared then in a letter published in the *Times*. It was said in this letter that such an explanation was "little more than an application to philosophy and politics of ideas taken from crude popular misconceptions of the Darwinian theory (of 'struggle for existence' and 'will to power,' 'survival of the fittest' and 'superman,' etc.); that there was, however, a work in English "which interprets biological and social progress not in terms of overbearing brute force and cunning, but in terms of mutual co-operation." It was suggested, therefore, that a cheap reprint of this book should be published without delay.

Such a reprint is now before the reader. It is a full reprint of the first edition, from which the Appendix only has been omitted as it contains matter of a rather special character.

Twelve years have passed since the first edition of this work was published, and it can be said that its fundamental idea—the idea that mutual aid represents in evolution an important *progressive* element—begins to be recognized by biologists. In most of the chief works on evolution which have appeared lately on the Continent, it is already indicated that

two different aspects of the struggle for life must be distinguished: the *exterior* war of the species against the adverse natural conditions and the rival species, and the *inner* war for the means of existence within the species. It is also admitted that both the extent of the latter and its importance in Evolution have been exaggerated, much to the regret of Darwin himself; while the importance of sociability and social instinct in animals for the well-being of the species, contrarily to Darwin's teaching, was underrated.

However, if the importance of mutual aid and support among animals begins to win recognition among modern thinkers, this is not yet the case for the second part of my thesis—the importance of these two factors in the history of Man, for the growth of his progressive social institutions.

The leaders of contemporary thought are still inclined to maintain that the masses had little concern in the evolution of the sociable institutions of man, and that all the progress made in this direction was due to the intellectual, political, and military leaders of the inert masses.

The present war, having brought the majority of the civilized nations of Europe into a close contact, not only with the realities of war, but also with thousands of its side effects in daily life, surely will contribute to alter the current teachings. It will show how much the creative, constructive genius of the mass of the people is required, whenever a nation has to live through a difficult moment of its history.

It was not the masses of the European nations who prepared the present war-calamity and worked out its barbarous methods: it was their rulers, their intellectual leaders. The masses of the people have nowhere had a voice in the preparation of the present slaughter, and still less so in the working out of the present methods of warfare, which represent an

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entire disregard of what we considered the best inheritance of civilization.

And if the wreckage of this inheritance will not be complete; if notwithstanding the crimes committed during this "civilized" war, we may still be sure that the teachings and traditions of human solidarity will, after all, emerge intact from the present ordeal, it is because, by the side of the extermination organized from above, we see thousands of those manifestations of spontaneous mutual aid, of which I speak in this book in the chapters devoted to Man.

The peasant women who, on seeing German and Austrian war prisoners wearily trudging through the streets of Kieff, thrust into their hands bread, apples, and occasionally a copper coin; the thousands of women and men who attend the wounded, without making any distinction between friend and foe, officer or soldier; the French and Russian peasants—old men left behind in their villages and women—who decide in their village folknotes to plough and to sow the fields of those who are "there," under the enemy's fire; the co-operative kitchens and *popottes communistes* which sprang up all over France; the spontaneous aid to the Belgian nation which comes from England and the United States, and to devastated Poland from the Russian people—both these undertakings implying such an immense amount of voluntary, freely organized labour and energy that all character of "charity" is lost in them, and they become mere neighbours' help—all these facts and many more similar ones are the seeds of new forms of life. They will lead to new institutions, just as mutual aid in the earlier ages of mankind gave origin later on to the best progressive institutions of civilized society.

To the chapters of this book which deal with the primitive and mediæval forms of mutual aid I should like especially now to draw the attention of the reader.

I do so in the earnest hope that in the midst of the misery and agony which this war has flung over the world, there is still room for the belief that the constructive forces of men being nevertheless at work, their action will tend to promote a better understanding between men, and eventually among nations.

MUTUAL AID AMONG ANIMALS

Struggle for existence. Mutual Aid, a law of Nature and chief factor of progressive evolution. Invertebrates. Ants and Bees. Birds, hunting and fishing associations. Sociability. Mutual protection among small birds. Cranes, parrots.

The conception of struggle for existence as a factor of evolution, introduced into science by Darwin

and Wallace, has permitted us to embrace an immensely-wide range of phenomena in one single generalization, which soon became the very basis of our philosophical, biological, and sociological speculations. An immense variety of facts: adaptations of function and structure of organic beings to their surroundings; physiological and anatomical evolution; intellectual progress, and moral development itself, which we formerly used to explain by so many different causes, were embodied by Darwin in one general conception. We understood them as continued endeavours—as a struggle against adverse circumstances—for such a development of individuals, races, species and societies, as would result in the greatest possible fulness, variety, and intensity of life. It may be that at the outset Darwin himself was not fully aware of the generality of the factor which he first invoked for explaining one series only of facts relative to the accumulation of individual variations in incipient species. But he foresaw that the term which he was introducing into science would lose its philosophical and its only true meaning if it were to be used in its narrow sense only—that of a struggle between separate individuals for the sheer means of existence. And at the very beginning of his memorable work he insisted upon the term being taken in its "large and metaphorical sense including dependence of one being on another, and including (which is more important) not only the life of the individual, but success in leaving progeny."

While he himself was chiefly using the term in its narrow sense for his own special purpose, he warned his followers against committing the error (which he seems once to have committed himself) of overrating its narrow meaning. In *The Descent of Man* he gave some powerful pages to illustrate its proper, wide sense. He pointed out how, in numberless animal societies, the struggle between separate individuals for the means of existence disappears, how struggle is replaced by co-operation, and how that substitution results in the development of intellectual and moral faculties which secure to the species the best conditions for survival. He intimated that in such cases the fittest are not the physically strongest, nor the cunningest, but those who learn to combine so as mutually to support each other, strong and weak alike, for the welfare of the community. "Those communities," he wrote, "which included the greatest number of the most sympathetic members would flourish best, and rear the greatest number of offspring" (2nd edit., p. 163). The term, which originated from the narrow Malthusian conception of competition between each and all, thus lost its narrowness in the mind of one who knew Nature.

Unhappily, these remarks, which might have become the basis of most fruitful researches, were overshadowed by the masses of facts gathered for the purpose of illustrating the consequences of a real competition for life. Besides, Darwin never attempted to submit to a closer investigation the relative importance of the two aspects under which the struggle for existence appears in the animal world, and he never wrote the work he proposed to write upon the natural checks to over-multiplication, although that work would have been the crucial test for appreciating the real purport of individual struggle. Nay, on the very pages just mentioned, amidst data disproving the narrow Malthusian conception of struggle, the old Malthusian leaven reappeared—namely, in Darwin's remarks as to the alleged inconveniences of maintaining the "weak in mind and body" in our civilized societies (Ch. v). As if thousands of weak-bodied and infirm poets, scientists, investors, and reformers, together with other thousands of so-called "fools" and "weak-minded enthusiasts," were not the most precious weapons used by humanity in its struggle for existence by intellectual and moral arms, which Darwin himself emphasized in those same chapters of *Descent of Man*.

It happened with Darwin's theory as it always happens with theories having any bearing upon human relations. Instead of widening it according to his own hints, his followers narrowed it still more. And while Herbert Spencer, starting on independent but closely-allied lines, attempted to widen the inquiry into that great question, "Who are the fittest?" especially in the appendix to the third edition of the *Data of Ethics*, the numberless followers of Darwin reduced the notion of struggle for existence to its narrowest limits. They came to conceive the animal world as a world of perpetual struggle among half-starved individuals, thirsting for one another's blood. They made modern literature resound with the war-cry of *woe to the vanquished*, as if it were the last word of modern biology. They raised the "pitiless" struggle for personal advantages to the height of a biological principle which man must submit to as well, under the menace of otherwise succumbing in a world based upon mutual extermination. Leaving aside the economists who know of natural science but a few words borrowed from second-hand vulgarizers, we must recognize that even the most authorized exponents of Darwin's views did their best to maintain those false ideas. In fact, if we take Huxley, who certainly is considered as one of the ablest exponents of the theory of evolution, were we not taught by him, in a paper on the 'Struggle for Existence and its Bearing upon Man,' that,

"from the point of view of the moralist, the animal world is on about the same level as a gladiator's show. The creatures are fairly well treated, and set to fight; whereby the strongest, the swiftest, and the cunningest live to fight another day. The spectator has no need to turn his thumb down, as no quarter is given."

Or, further down in the same article, did he not tell us that, as among animals, so among primitive men,

"the weakest and stupidest went to the wall, while the toughest and shrewdest, those who were best fitted to cope with their circumstances, but not the best in another way, survived. Life was a continuous free fight, and beyond the limited and temporary relations of the family, the Hobbesian war of each against all was the normal state of existence."¹

In how far this view of nature is supported by fact, will be seen from the evidence which will be here submitted to the reader as regards the animal world, and as regards primitive man. But it may be remarked at once that Huxley's view of nature had as little claim to be taken as a scientific deduction as the opposite view of Rousseau, who saw in nature but love, peace, and harmony destroyed by the accession of man. In fact, the first walk in the forest, the first observation upon any animal society, or even the perusal of any serious work dealing with animal life (D'Orbigny's, Audubon's, Le Vaillant's, no matter which), cannot but set the naturalist thinking about the part taken by social life in the life of animals, and prevent him from seeing in Nature nothing but a field of slaughter, just as this would prevent him from seeing in Nature nothing but harmony and peace. Rousseau had committed the error of excluding the beak-and-claw fight from his thoughts; and Huxley committed the opposite error; but neither Rousseau's optimism nor Huxley's pessimism can be accepted as an impartial interpretation of nature.

As soon as we study animals—not in laboratories and museums only, but in the forest and the prairie, in the steppe and the mountains—we at once perceive that though there is an immense amount of warfare and extermination going on amidst various species, and especially amidst various classes of animals, there is, at the same time, as much, or perhaps even more, of mutual support, mutual aid, and mutual defence amidst animals belonging to the same species or, at least, to the same society. Sociability is as much a law of nature as mutual struggle. Of course it would be extremely difficult to estimate,

¹*Nineteenth Century*, Feb. 1888, p. 165.

however roughly, the relative numerical importance of both these series of facts. But if we resort to an indirect test, and ask Nature: "Who are the fittest: those who are continually at war with each other, or those who support one another?" we at once see that those animals which acquire habits of mutual aid are undoubtedly the fittest. They have more chances to survive, and they attain, in their respective classes, the highest development of intelligence and bodily organization. If the numberless facts which can be brought forward to support this view are taken into account, we may safely say that mutual aid is as much a law of animal life as mutual struggle, but that, as a factor of evolution, it most probably has a far greater importance, inasmuch as it favours the development of such habits and characters as insure the maintenance and further development of the species, together with the greatest amount of welfare and enjoyment of life for the individual, with the least waste of energy.

Of the scientific followers of Darwin, the first, as far as I know, who understood the full purport of Mutual Aid as a law of Nature and the chief factor of evolution, was a well-known Russian zoologist the late Dean of the St. Petersburg University, Professor Kessler. He developed his ideas in an address which he delivered in January 1880, a few months before his death, at a Congress of Russian naturalists; but, like so many good things published in the Russian tongue only, that remarkable address remains almost entirely unknown.²

"As a zoologist of old standing," he felt bound to protest against the abuse of a term—the struggle for existence—borrowed from zoology, or, at least,

²Leaving aside the pre-Darwinian writers, like Toussenel, Fée, and many others, several works containing many striking instances of mutual aid—chiefly, however, illustrating animal intelligence—were issued previously to that date. I may mention those of Houzeau, *Les facultés mentales des animaux*, 2 vols., Brussels, 1872; L. Büchner's *Aus dem Geistesleben der Thiere*, 2nd ed. in 1877; and Maximilian Perty's *Ueber das Seelenleben der Thiere*, Leipzig, 1876. Espinas published his most remarkable work, *Les Sociétés animales*, in 1877, and in that work he pointed out the importance of animal societies, and their bearing upon the preservation of species, and entered upon a most valuable discussion of the origin of societies. In fact, Espinas's book contains all that has been written since upon mutual aid, and many good things besides. If I nevertheless make a special mention of Kessler's address, it is because he raised mutual aid to the height of a law much more important in evolution than the law of mutual struggle. The same ideas were developed next year (in April 1881) by J. Lanessan in a lecture published in 1882 under this title: *La lutte pour l'existence et l'association pour la lutte*. G. Romanes's capital work, *Animal Intelligence*, was issued in 1882, and followed next year by the *Mental Evolution in Animals*. About the same time (1883), Büchner published another work, *Liebe und Liebes-Leben in der Thierwelt*, a second edition of which was issued in 1885. The idea, as seen, was in the air.

against overrating its importance. Zoology, he said, and those sciences which deal with man, continually insist upon what they call the pitiless law of struggle for existence. But they forget the existence of another law which may be described as the law of mutual aid, which law, at least for the animals, is far more essential than the former. He pointed out how the need of leaving progeny necessarily brings animals together, and, "the more the individuals keep together, the more they mutually support each other, and the more are the chances of the species for surviving, as well as for making further progress in its intellectual development." "All classes of animals," he continued, "and especially the higher ones, practise mutual aid," and he illustrated his idea by examples borrowed from the life of the burying beetles and the social life of birds and some mammalia. The examples were few, as might have been expected in a short opening address, but the chief points were clearly stated; and, after mentioning that in the evolution of mankind mutual aid played a still more prominent part, Professor Kessler concluded as follows:

"I obviously do not deny the struggle for existence, but I maintain that the progressive development of the animal kingdom, and especially of mankind, is favoured much more by mutual support than by mutual struggle. . . . All organic beings have two essential needs: that of nutrition, and that of propagating the species. The former brings them to a struggle and to mutual extermination, while the needs of maintaining the species bring them to approach one another and to support one another. But I am inclined to think that in the evolution of the organic world—in the progressive modification of organic beings—mutual support among individuals plays a much more important part than their mutual struggle."³

The correctness of the above views struck most of the Russian zoologists present, and Syevertoff, whose work is well known to ornithologists and geographers, supported them and illustrated them by a few more examples. He mentioned some of the species of falcons which have "an almost ideal organization for robbery," and nevertheless are in decay, while other species of falcons, which practise mutual help, do thrive. "Take, on the other side, a sociable bird, the duck," he said; "it is poorly organized on the whole, but it practises mutual support, and it almost invades the earth, as may be judged from its numberless varieties and species."

The readiness of the Russian zoologists to accept Kessler's views seems quite natural, because nearly

³*Memoirs (Trudy) of the St. Petersburg Society of Naturalists*, vol. xi. 1880.

all of them have had opportunities of studying the animal world in the wide uninhabited regions of Northern Asia and East Russia; and it is impossible to study like regions without being brought to the same ideas. I recollect myself the impression produced upon me by the animal world of Siberia when I explored the Vitim regions in the company of so accomplished a zoologist as my friend Polyakoff was. We both were under the fresh impression of the *Origin of Species*, but we vainly looked for the keen competition between animals of the same species which the reading of Darwin's work had prepared us to expect, even after taking into account the remarks of the third chapter (p. 54). We saw plenty of adaptations for struggling, very often in common, against the adverse circumstances of climate, or against various enemies, and Polyakoff wrote many a good page upon the mutual dependency of carnivores, ruminants, and rodents in their geographical distribution; we witnessed numbers of facts of mutual support, especially during the migrations of birds and ruminants; but even in the Amur and Usuri regions, where animal life swarms in abundance, facts of real competition and struggle between higher animals of the same species came very seldom under my notice, though I eagerly searched for them. The same impression appears in the works of most Russian zoologists, and it probably explains why Kessler's ideas were so welcomed by the Russian Darwinists, whilst like ideas are not in vogue amidst the followers of Darwin in Western Europe.

MUTUAL AID AMONGST OURSELVES

Popular revolts at the beginning of the State-period. Mutual Aid institutions of the present time. The village community, its struggles for resisting its abolition by the State. Habits derived from the village-community life, retained in our modern villages: Switzerland, France, Germany, Russia.

The mutual-aid tendency in man has so remote an origin, and is so deeply interwoven with all the past evolution of the human race, that it has been maintained by mankind up to the present time, notwithstanding all vicissitudes of history. It was chiefly evolved during periods of peace and prosperity; but when even the greatest calamities befell men—when whole countries were laid waste by wars, and whole populations were decimated by misery, or groaned under the yoke of tyranny—the same tendency continued to live in the villages and among the poorer classes in the towns; it still kept them together, and in the long run it reacted even upon those ruling, fighting, and devastating minorities which dismissed it as sentimental nonsense. And

whenever mankind had to work out a new social organization, adapted to a new phasis of development, its constructive genius always drew the elements and the inspiration for the new departure from that same ever-living tendency. New economical and social institutions, in so far as they were a creation of the masses, new ethical systems, and new religions, all have originated from the same source, and the ethical progress of our race, viewed in its broad lines, appears as a gradual extension of the mutual-aid principles from the tribe to always larger and larger agglomerations, so as to finally embrace one day the whole of mankind, without respect to its divers creeds, languages, and races.

After having passed through the savage tribe, and next through the village community, the Europeans came to work out in mediæval times a new form of organization, which had the advantage of allowing great latitude for individual initiative, while it largely responded at the same time to man's need of mutual support. A federation of village communities, covered by a network of guilds and fraternities, was called into existence in the mediæval cities. The immense results achieved under this new form of union—in well-being for all, in industries, art, science, and commerce—were discussed at some length in two preceding chapters, and an attempt was also made to show why, towards the end of the fifteenth century, the mediæval republics—surrounded by domains of hostile feudal lords, unable to free the peasants from servitude, and gradually corrupted by ideas of Roman Cæsarism—were doomed to become a prey to the growing military States.

However, before submitting for three centuries to come, to the all-absorbing authority of the State, the masses of the people made a formidable attempt at reconstructing society on the old basis of mutual aid and support. It is well known by this time that the great movement of the reform was not a mere revolt against the abuses of the Catholic Church. It had its constructive ideal as well, and that ideal was life in free, brotherly communities. Those of the early writings and sermons of the period which found most response with the masses were imbued with ideas of the economical and social brotherhood of mankind. The "Twelve Articles" and similar professions of faith, which were circulated among the German and Swiss peasants and artisans, maintained not only every one's right to interpret the Bible according to his own understanding, but also included the demand of communal lands being restored to the village communities and feudal servitudes being abolished, and they always alluded to the "true" faith—a faith of brotherhood. At the same time scores of thousands of men and women

joined the communist fraternities of Moravia, giving them all their fortune and living in numerous and prosperous settlements constructed upon the principles of communism.⁴ Only wholesale massacres by the thousand could put a stop to this widely-spread popular movement, and it was by the sword, the fire, and the rack that the young States secured their first and decisive victory over the masses of the people.⁵

For the next three centuries the States, both on the Continent and in these islands, systematically weeded out all institutions in which the mutual-aid tendency had formerly found its expression. The village communities were bereft of their folk-motes, their courts and independent administration; their lands were confiscated. The guilds were spoliated of their possessions and liberties, and placed under the control, the fancy, and the bribery of the State's official. The cities were divested of their sovereignty, and the very springs of their inner life—the folk-mote, the elected justices and administration, the sovereign parish and the sovereign guild—were annihilated; the State's functionary took possession of every link of what formerly was an organic whole. Under that fatal policy and the wars it engendered, whole regions, once populous and wealthy, were laid bare; rich cities became insignificant boroughs; the very roads which connected them with other cities became impracticable. Industry, art, and knowledge fell into decay. Political education, science, and law were rendered subservient to the idea of State centralization. It was taught in the Universities and from the pulpit that the institutions in which men formerly used to embody their needs of mutual support could not be tolerated in a properly organized State; that the State alone could represent the bonds

⁴A bulky literature, dealing with this formerly much-neglected subject, is now growing in Germany. Keller's works, *Ein Apostel der Wiedertäufer* and *Geschichte der Wiedertäufer*, Cornelius's *Geschichte des münsterischen Auftritts*, and Janssen's *Geschichte des deutschen Volkes* may be named as the leading sources. The first attempt at familiarizing English readers with the results of the wide researches made in Germany in this direction has been made in an excellent little work by Richard Heath—"Anabaptism from its Rise at Zwickau to its Fall at Münster, 1521-1536," London, 1895 (*Baptist Manuals*, vol. i.)—where the leading features of the movement are well indicated, and full bibliographical information is given. Also K. Kautsky's *Communism in Central Europe in the Time of the Reformation*, London, 1897.

⁵Few of our contemporaries realize both the extent of this movement and the means by which it was suppressed. But those who wrote immediately after the great peasant war estimated at from 100,000 to 150,000 men the number of peasants slaughtered after their defeat in Germany. See Zimmermann's *Allgemeine Geschichte des grossen Bauernkrieges*. For the measures taken to suppress the movement in the Netherlands see Richard Heath's *Anabaptism*.

of union between its subjects; that federalism and "particularism" were the enemies of progress, and the State was the only proper initiator of further development. By the end of the last century the kings on the Continent, the Parliament in these isles, and the revolutionary Convention in France, although they were at war with each other, agreed in asserting that no separate unions between citizens must exist within the State; that hard labour and death were the only suitable punishments to workers who dared to enter into "coalitions." "No state within the State!" The State alone, and the State's Church, must take care of matters of general interest, while the subjects must represent loose aggregations of individuals, connected by no particular bonds, bound to appeal to the Government each time that they feel a common need. Up to the middle of the nineteenth century this was the theory and practice in Europe. Even commercial and industrial societies were looked at with suspicion. As to the workers, their unions were treated as unlawful almost within our own lifetime in this country and within the last twenty years on the Continent. The whole system of our State education was such that up to the present time, even in this country, a notable portion of society would treat as a revolutionary measure the concession of such rights as every one, freeman or serf, exercised five hundred years ago in the village folk-mote, the guild, the parish, and the city.

The absorption of all social functions by the State necessarily favoured the development of an unbribed, narrow-minded individualism. In proportion as the obligations towards the State grew in numbers, the citizens were evidently relieved from their obligations towards each other. In the guild—and in mediæval times every man belonged to some guild or fraternity—two "brothers" were bound to watch in turns a brother who had fallen ill; it would be sufficient now to give one's neighbour the address of the next paupers' hospital. In barbarian society, to assist at a fight between two men, arisen from a quarrel, and not to prevent it from taking a fatal issue, meant to be oneself treated as a murderer; but under the theory of the all-protecting State the bystander need not intrude: it is the policeman's business to interfere, or not. And while in a savage land, among the Hottentots, it would be scandalous to eat without having loudly called out thrice whether there is not somebody wanting to share the food, all that a respectable citizen has to do now is to pay the poor tax and to let the starving starve. The result is, that the theory which maintains that men can, and must, seek their own happiness in a disregard of other people's wants is now triumphant all round—in law, in science, in religion. It is the religion of the day, and to doubt of its

efficacy is to be a dangerous Utopian. Science loudly proclaims that the struggle of each against all is the leading principle of nature, and of human societies as well. To that struggle Biology ascribes the progressive evolution of the animal world. History takes the same line of argument; and political economists, in their naïve ignorance, trace all progress of modern industry and machinery to the "wonderful" effects of the same principle. The very religion of the pulpit is a religion of individualism, slightly mitigated by more or less charitable relations to one's neighbours, chiefly on Sundays. "Practical" men and theorists, men of science and religious preachers, lawyers and politicians, all agree upon one thing—that individualism may be more or less softened in its harshest effects by charity, but that it is the only secure basis for the maintenance of society and its ulterior progress.

It seems, therefore, hopeless to look for mutual-aid institutions and practices in modern society. What could remain of them? And yet, as soon as we try to ascertain how the millions of human beings live, and begin to study their everyday relations, we are struck with the immense part which the mutual-aid and mutual-support principles play even now-days in human life. Although the destruction of mutual-aid institutions has been going on in practice and theory, for full three or four hundred years, hundreds of millions of men continue to live under such institutions; they piously maintain them and endeavour to reconstitute them where they have ceased to exist. In our mutual relations every one of us has his moments of revolt against the fashion-

able individualistic creed of the day, and actions in which men are guided by their mutual-aid inclinations constitute so great a part of our daily intercourse that if a stop to such actions could be put all further ethical progress would be stopped at once. Human society itself could not be maintained for even so much as the lifetime of one single generation. These facts, mostly neglected by sociologists and yet of the first importance for the life and further elevation of mankind, we are now going to analyze, beginning with the standing institutions of mutual support, and passing next to those acts of mutual aid which have their origin in personal or social sympathies.

When we cast a broad glance on the present constitution of European society we are struck at once with the fact that, although so much has been done to get rid of the village community, this form of union continues to exist to the extent we shall presently see, and that many attempts are now made either to reconstitute it in some shape or another or to find some substitute for it. The current theory as regards the village community is, that in Western Europe it has died out by a natural death, because the communal possession of the soil was found inconsistent with the modern requirements of agriculture. But the truth is that nowhere did the village community disappear of its own accord; everywhere, on the contrary, it took the ruling classes several centuries of persistent but not always successful efforts to abolish it and to confiscate the communal lands.