



Mutual Aid a Factor of Evolution. by P. Kropotkin

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not agree with him will be constrained by his positive and occasionally exaggerated statements to formulate their dissent. This latter service is one of the greatest which a theoretical work can render.

MUNROE SMITH.

Mutual Aid a Factor of Evolution. By P. KROPOTKIN. New York, McClure, Phillips & Co., 1902. — 8vo, xix, 348 pp.

The very title of the book shows that a problem of great scientific importance is approached. While the fundamental ideas of the work are perhaps not altogether new, nobody before Kropotkin has undertaken in this direct way to state the rôle that mutual aid has played in evolution and its relation to the struggle for existence. Obviously the term "mutual aid" may convey many different meanings. It may be understood as the "sense of justice and equity," it may apply to a community of interests, to a co-operative struggle for existence, to the *belli auxilia* in the Hobbesian sense. One soon discovers that Kropotkin uses the expression in the vaguest possible way.

Kropotkin begins by citing cases of mutual support among animals, but in all the cases cited we fail to see anything but gregarious co-operation for a common purpose — an interesting subject of study, no doubt, but something quite different from mutual aid for its own sake. Kropotkin maintains that "mutual aid" is as much a law of animal life as mutual struggle, but that as a factor in evolution it most probably has a far greater importance, inasmuch as it favors the development of habits and characters which make for the survival of the species and the greatest welfare of the individual. This is doubtless true, but Kropotkin fails to prove that mutual aid is the antithesis of mutual struggle. "Mutual aid in struggle" would have been perhaps a better name for these complex phenomena to which Kropotkin devotes the first two chapters of his book.

The following two chapters deal with mutual aid among savages and barbarians. To all who have read other works by the same author it is probably well known that state and authority are his *bêtes noires*. It is therefore natural that the social life of savages appears to him to represent the ideals of communistic anarchism. Not that he consciously selects the data to suit his theories, but the nature of all so-called original material relating to savage life is such that it may be used in support of almost any position.

Kropotkin is, however, unquestionably right in asserting that mu-

tual aid in some form or other permeates the social relations of all savages and barbarians. A study of the evolution of mutual aid in human society from its beginnings in tribal organizations to the forms it takes in modern state and city would have been most fruitful. Such a study is, however, very far from the purpose of our author. What Kropotkin aims to give is a sociology from the point of view of communistic anarchism. He does not recognize the mutual aid that characterizes the functions of the modern state and city. Instead, he emphasizes the struggles of individuals and of states.

In his excellent chapters on mutual aid in the mediæval city, he naturally enough fails to see that the mediæval city was a state, or the organ of a state; he regards it as a free federation of guilds. Nor is even the mediæval state itself odious to him, since it appears to him to be an almost anarchistic society. It is the same old story of paradise lost, of the golden age, and the same old hope of the millennium. According to Kropotkin it almost seems that all of our good qualities have been transmitted to us from the state of nature, before we fell from grace, before we developed political authority.

In his chapter on mutual aid among ourselves, Kropotkin naturally finds that the state is the root of all evil. The thought that we have outgrown village conditions and that our mutual aid, if it is to be effective, must be adequately organized and specialized, does not even occur to him. And it is almost painful to find that a man of his breadth of mind should sneer at us because we have antiseptic public hospitals with efficient physicians and nurses to take care of the sick instead of leaving that function to the fraternal good-will of the individual.

Kropotkin's statements in regard to the village community in Russia are very inaccurate. "Nowhere," he writes, "did the village community disappear of its own accord; it took the ruling classes several centuries of persistent but not always successful efforts to abolish it . . ." (p. 230). "In short, to speak of the natural death of the village communities in virtue of economic laws is as grim a joke as to speak of the natural death of soldiers slaughtered on a battlefield" (p. 236). As a fact, however, the Russian village community is simply a product of the agrarian policy of the state. Before the abolition of serfdom, the Russian peasantry were either the property of the nobles — that is, private serfs — or of the state — crown-land peasants.

Unlike the German noble, the Russian noble landlord took no interest in agricultural improvements; he did not undertake large-scale farming under his own direction. He usually left the farming entirely to his peasants, exacting from them in tribute as much as he possibly

could. This plan was so general that the serfs universally believed that while they themselves belonged to the nobleman, the land belonged to them — a legal absurdity. It is evident that since the farming was done by serf-families, it was necessary for the landlord to see to it that each peasant-family was provided with land. The land, however, was a fixed quantity, while the composition of each serf-family and the number of such families were constantly changing. Constant reallocations of the land were therefore necessary. And here you have the much-talked-of village community.

The private serfs did not constitute the whole of the Russian peasantry; there was a large class of peasants who lived on crown lands. There was further a considerable number of free farmers (*odnodvorcy*, or single-farm-owners), descendants of petty officers who were employed in the early days by the Tzars of Moskow and received small land grants from them for their services. During the nineteenth century the village community was to a very large extent imposed upon by these two classes for fiscal reasons. The crown-land peasants have been since 1724 subject to a poll tax. The land was originally only nominally owned by the state; as a matter of fact, the peasants bought, sold, leased, rented, and willed their land at their pleasure. The result was of course that a differentiation of peasantry took place. Some became large landowners, others became extremely poor. The poll tax in the meantime was the same, and the poor were unable to pay it. Instead of adjusting the tax-rate to the changed conditions, the government decided to restore equality among the peasantry by the introduction of the village community system. Such was the law passed in 1770, the complete text of which may be found in the *Complete Collection of Laws of the Russian Empire* under No. 13,590. This law, however, had only local effect. In northern Russia the peasantry were so individualistic that it took the government decades to introduce the village community. The ordinance of March 6, 1830, was of such a nature that it could not be disobeyed, and the blessings of the village community were in 1830-31 introduced there, though only after bloodshed.

But Kropotkin does not object to state and law so long as they introduce the village community, and he does not even notice the atrocities with which such measures are often accompanied. "The peasants," he writes,

were formerly individual owners of their plots and used to rent and sell their land at will. But in the fifties of the nineteenth century a move-

ment began among them in favor of communal possession, the chief argument being the growing number of pauper families [pp. 253, 254].

As a matter of fact this movement began not among the peasants, but in administrative circles at St. Petersburg. The moving spirit was Count Kisseleff, a very remarkable statesman, who like the Russian revolutionists believed in the village community, but for different reasons. He saw in the village community a conservative force that would preserve the Russian *status quo*. He thought that the village community would save Russia from a landless proletariat class and a labor movement, since it would prevent mobilization of property and provide equal allotments for each member of the community. Count Kisseleff, who in eleven years of his administration compelled 533,201 peasants to adopt the village-community system, was not so blind as not to see its economic disadvantages, but he was willing to sacrifice economic considerations to the political purpose.

But Kropotkin, as the reader will certainly observe, cites instances where the village community is compatible with agricultural improvements. The instances are correct, but they are exceptions and not the rule. Kropotkin takes all his data from V. Voronoff's book, which was a decade behind the times when it was published in 1892. The fact is that the village community is going to pieces with a marvelous rapidity. It is a dead issue. It ruined the peasantry: it introduced equality among them, but it was the equality of destitution; and the development of capitalism has entirely disintegrated the old institution. Those who desire to find proofs of these statements will find them in my article "Mir," in Conrad's *Handwörterbuch*, second edition, and in my book *Die Feldgemeinschaft in Russland* (Jena, 1898), especially in chapters 27, 36, 37, and 38. One has only to add that several months ago the government itself was obliged to abolish the several and joint liability which was a mainstay of the village community.

To sum up: Kropotkin has failed in his attempt to give us a scientific work on mutual aid as a factor of evolution, but as he is the first to consider the problem, great credit is due to him. Because of his opposition to the state, he is forced to ignore compulsory mutual aid. But whatever the scientific failings of this work may be, it is certainly so important that its perusal is mandatory upon all who are interested in social science.

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