

Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution

Chapter eight

by Peter Kropotkin

Introduction

IN this chapter, Kropotkin covers the state's destruction of medieval guilds and associations, the rise of trade unions, and the many and varied examples of mutual aid in society. He particularly notes the huge degree to which mutual support is practiced amongst the impoverished, especially by women, but suggests the urge to practice mutual aid is so deeply ingrained in the human character that it even exists, albeit in a stunted form, in the wealthy. Preceding that, we have included a part of Kropotkin's introduction to the book, discussing how he came upon the idea of mutual aid and observed it in nature.

Much time is wasted by political aficionados, of assorted tendencies, digging up the decomposing corpses of ancient texts and arguments and poring over these remains in search of great truths to be bent, manipulated, and twisted in order that they can be applied to the situation we find ourselves in today.

This isn't the case with this text – apart from some rather old-fashioned turns of phrase – there's barely a sentence which doesn't speak directly to the situation we currently find ourselves in. Which is astonishing, inspiring and fucking depressing as it would have been nice if some of the progress Kropotkin optimistically expects had actually happened.

But it didn't. So it's time to dust off this text, not get sucked in by the endless bullshit of politicians and profiteers, and instead, trust ourselves and our abilities, and have another go at building a sensible society that meets people's real needs.

– Sam Buchanan

First published 1902. This edition by The Freedom Shop, Te Whanganui-ā-Tara, 2023.

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one of the poorest classes. Lord Shaftesbury had understood this terrible truth when he started his Flowers and Watercress Girls' Fund, out of which loans of one pound, and only occasionally two pounds, were granted, to enable the girls to buy a basket and flowers when the winter sets in and they are in dire distress. The loans were given to girls who had 'not a sixpence', but never failed to find some other poor to go bail for them. "Of all the movements I have ever been connected with," Lord Shaftesbury wrote, "I look upon this Watercress Girls' movement as the most successful... It was begun in 1872, and we have had out 800 to 1,000 loans, and have not lost £50. during the whole period... What has been lost – and it has been very little, under the circumstances – has been by reason of death or sickness, not by fraud" (The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, by Edwin Hodder, London, 1885-86).

9. Samuel Plimsoll, *Our Seamen*, cheap edition, London, 1870. Mr. Plimsoll added: "I don't wish to disparage the rich, but I think it may be reasonably doubted whether these qualities are so fully developed in them; for, notwithstanding that not a few of them are not unacquainted with the claims, reasonable or unreasonable, of poor relatives, these qualities are not in such constant exercise. Riches seem in so many cases to smother the manliness of their possessors, and their sympathies become, not so much narrowed as – so to speak – stratified: they are reserved for the sufferings of their own class, and also the woes of those above them. They seldom tend downwards much, and they are far more likely to admire an act of courage... than to admire the constantly exercised fortitude and the tenderness which are the daily characteristics of a British workman's life" – and of the workmen all over the world as well.

in order to take off his prison uniform. As he was lying in the ditch a fire broke out in the village. He saw a woman running out of one of the burning houses, and heard her desperate appeals to rescue a child in the upper storey of the burning house. No one moved to do so. Then the escaped prisoner dashed out of his retreat, made his way through the fire, and, with a scalded face and burning clothes, brought the child safe out of the fire, and handed it to its mother. Of course he was arrested on the spot by the village gendarme, who now made his appearance. He was taken back to the prison. The fact was reported in all French papers, but none of them bestirred itself to obtain his release. If he had shielded a warder from a comrade's blow, he would have been made a hero of. But his act was simply humane, it did not promote the state's ideal; he himself did not attribute it to a sudden inspiration of divine grace; and that was enough to let the man fall into oblivion. Perhaps, six or twelve months were added to his sentence for having stolen – 'the state's property' – the prison's dress.

6. The Medical Academy for Women (which has given to Russia a large portion of her 700 graduated women doctors), the four Ladies' Universities (about 1,000 pupils in 1887; closed that year, and reopened in 1895), and the High Commercial School for Women are entirely the work of such private societies. To the same societies we owe the high standard which the girls' gymnasia attained since they were opened in the sixties. The 100 gymnasia now scattered over the Empire (over 70,000 pupils), correspond to the High Schools for Girls in this country; all teachers are, however, graduates of the universities.

7. The Verein für Verbreitung gemeinnützlicher Kenntnisse, although it has only 5,500 members, has already opened more than 1,000 public and school libraries, organised thousands of lectures, and published most valuable books.

8. Many rich people cannot understand how the very poor can help each other, because they do not realise upon what infinitesimal amounts of food or money often hangs the life of

Introduction to 'Mutual Aid'

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 snowstorms 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 realise 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

Notes

1. The National Association for the Protection of Labour included about 150 separate unions, which paid high levies, and had a membership of about 100,000. The Builders' Union and the Miners' Unions also were big organisations.
2. Great changes have taken place since the forties in the attitude of the richer classes towards the unions. However, even in the sixties, the employers made a formidable concerted attempt to crush them by locking out whole populations. Up to 1869 the simple agreement to strike, and the announcement of a strike by placards, to say nothing of picketing, were often punished as intimidation. Only in 1875 the Master and Servant Act was repealed, peaceful picketing was permitted, and “violence and intimidation” during strikes fell into the domain of common law. Yet, even during the dock-labourers' strike in 1887, relief money had to be spent for fighting before the Courts for the right of picketing, while the prosecutions of the last few years menace once more to render the conquered rights illusory.
3. A weekly contribution of sixpence. out of an 18 shilling. wage, or of 1 shilling out of 25 shillings, means much more than £9 out of a £300 income: it is mostly taken upon food; and the levy is soon doubled when a strike is declared in a brother union.
4. The 31,473 productive and consumers' associations on the Middle Rhine showed, about 1890, a yearly expenditure of £18,437,500; £3,675,000 were granted during the year in loans.
5. Escape from a French prison is extremely difficult; nevertheless a prisoner escaped from one of the French prisons in 1884 or 1885. He even managed to conceal himself during the whole day, although the alarm was given and the peasants in the neighbourhood were on the look-out for him. Next morning found him concealed in a ditch, close by a small village. Perhaps he intended to steal some food, or some clothes

acquiring notoriety, political power, or social distinction often spoils the true character of that sort of benevolence, there is no doubt possible as to the impulse coming in the majority of cases from the same mutual aid feelings. People who have acquired wealth very often do not find in it the expected satisfaction. Others begin to feel that, whatever economists may say about wealth being the reward of capacity, their own reward is exaggerated. The conscience of human solidarity begins to tell; and, although society life is so arranged as to stifle that feeling by thousands of artful means, it often gets the upper hand; and then they try to find an outcome for that deeply human need by giving their fortune, or their forces, to something which, in their opinion, will promote general welfare.

In short, neither the crushing powers of the centralised state nor the teachings of mutual hatred and pitiless struggle which came, adorned with the attributes of science, from obliging philosophers and sociologists, could weed out the feeling of human solidarity, deeply lodged in people's understanding and heart, because it has been nurtured by all our preceding evolution.

What was the outcome of evolution since its earliest stages cannot be overpowered by one of the aspects of that same evolution. And the need of mutual aid and support which had lately taken refuge in the narrow circle of the family, or the slum neighbours, in the village, or the secret union of workers, re-asserts itself again, even in our modern society, and claims its rights to be, as it always has been, the chief leader towards further progress.

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 humans, owing to their higher intelligence and knowledge, may mitigate the harshness of the struggle for life between themselves; but they all recognised at the same time that the struggle for the means of existence, of every animal against all its congeners, and of every person against all other people, 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.

Mutual Aid: A Factor in Evolution – Chapter eight**Labour unions after the destruction of the guilds by the state**

When we examine the every-day life of the rural populations of Europe, we find that, notwithstanding all that has been done in modern states for the destruction of the village community, the life of the peasants remains honeycombed with habits and customs of mutual aid and support; that important vestiges of the communal possession of the soil are still retained; and that, as soon as the legal obstacles to rural association were lately removed, a network of free unions for all sorts of economical purposes rapidly spread among the peasants – the tendency of this young movement being to reconstitute some sort of union similar to the village community of old. Such being the conclusions arrived at in the preceding chapter, we have now to consider, what institutions for mutual support can be found at the present time amongst the industrial populations.

For the last three hundred years, the conditions for the growth of such institutions have been as unfavourable in the towns as they have been in the villages. It is well known, indeed, that when the medieval cities were subdued in the sixteenth century by growing military states, all institutions which kept the artisans, the masters, and the merchants together in the guilds and the cities were violently destroyed. The self-government and the self-jurisdiction of both, the guild and the city were abolished; the oath of allegiance between guild-brothers became an act of felony towards the state; the properties of the guilds were confiscated in the same way as the lands of the village communities; and the inner and technical organisation of each trade was taken in hand by the state.

Laws, gradually growing in severity, were passed to prevent artisans from combining in any way. For a time, some shadows of the old guilds were tolerated: merchants' guilds were allowed to exist under the condition of freely granting subsidies to the kings, and some artisan guilds were kept in existence as organs of administration. Some of them still drag on their meaningless

sufferings of the poor, and even the slavery of the negroes, were part of the divine plan! Was not Nonconformism itself largely a popular protest against the harsh treatment of the poor at the hand of the established church?

With such spiritual leaders, the feelings of the richer classes necessarily became, as Mr. Plimsoll remarked, not so much blunted as 'stratified'. They seldom went downwards towards the poor, from whom the well-to-do-people are separated by their manner of life, and whom they do not know under their best aspects, in their everyday life. But among themselves – allowance being made for the effects of the wealth-accumulating passions and the futile expenses imposed by wealth itself – among themselves, in the circle of family and friends, the rich practise the same mutual aid and support as the poor.

Dr Ihering and L Dargun are perfectly right in saying that if a statistical record could be taken of all the money which passes from hand to hand in the shape of friendly loans and aid, the sum total would be enormous, even in comparison with the commercial transactions of the world's trade. And if we could add to it, as we certainly ought to, what is spent in hospitality, petty mutual services, the management of other people's affairs, gifts and charities, we certainly should be struck by the importance of such transfers in national economy. Even in the world which is ruled by commercial egotism, the current expression, 'We have been harshly treated by that firm', shows that there is also the friendly treatment, as opposed to the harsh, i.e. the legal treatment; while every commercial manager knows how many firms are saved every year from failure by the friendly support of other firms.

As to the charities and the amounts of work for general well-being which are voluntarily done by so many well-to-do persons, as well as by workers, and especially by professionals, every one knows the part which is played by these two categories of benevolence in modern life. If the desire of

do men do this, I don't doubt. But consider the difference." Consider what a sum of one shilling, subscribed by each worker to help a comrade's widow, or sixpence to help a fellow-worker to defray the extra expense of a funeral, means for one who earns 16s. a week and has a wife, and in some cases five or six children to support.⁹ But such subscriptions are a general practice among the workers all over the world, even in much more ordinary cases than a death in the family, while aid in work is the commonest thing in their lives.

Nor do the same practices of mutual aid and support fail among the richer classes. Of course, when one thinks of the harshness which is often shown by the richer employers towards their employees, one feels inclined to take the most pessimist view of human nature. Many must remember the indignation which was aroused during the great Yorkshire strike of 1894, when old miners who had picked coal from an abandoned pit were prosecuted by the colliery owners. And, even if we leave aside the horrors of the periods of struggle and social war, such as the extermination of thousands of workers' prisoners after the fall of the Paris Commune – who can read, for instance, revelations of the labour inquest which was made here in the forties, or what Lord Shaftesbury wrote about “the frightful waste of human life in the factories, to which the children taken from the workhouses, or simply purchased all over this country to be sold as factory slaves, were consigned” – who can read that without being vividly impressed by the baseness which is possible in man when his greediness is at stake?

But it must also be said that all fault for such treatment must not be thrown entirely upon the criminality of human nature. Were not the teachings of men of science, and even of a notable portion of the clergy, up to a quite recent time, teachings of distrust, despite and almost hatred towards the poorer classes? Did not science teach that since serfdom has been abolished, no one need be poor unless for his own vices? And how few in the church had the courage to blame the children-killers, while the great numbers taught that the

existence. But what formerly was the vital force of medieval life and industry has long since disappeared under the crushing weight of the centralised state.

In Great Britain, which may be taken as the best illustration of the industrial policy of the modern States, we see the parliament beginning the destruction of the guilds as early as the fifteenth century; but it was especially in the next century that decisive measures were taken. Henry the Eighth not only ruined the organisation of the guilds, but also confiscated their properties, with even less excuse and manners, as Toulmin Smith wrote, than he had produced for confiscating the estates of the monasteries. Edward the Sixth completed his work, and already in the second part of the sixteenth century we find the parliament settling all the disputes between craftsmen and merchants, which formerly were settled in each city separately.

The parliament and the king not only legislated in all such contests, but, keeping in view the interests of the Crown in the exports, they soon began to determine the number of apprentices in each trade and minutely to regulate the very technics of each fabrication – the weights of the stuffs, the number of threads in the yard of cloth, and the like. With little success, it must be said; because contests and technical difficulties which were arranged for centuries in succession by agreement between closely interdependent guilds and federated cities lay entirely beyond the powers of the centralised state.

The continual interference of its officials paralysed the trades; bringing most of them to a complete decay; and the last century economists, when they rose against the state regulation of industries, only ventilated a widely-felt discontent. The abolition of that interference by the French Revolution was greeted as an act of liberation, and the example of France was soon followed elsewhere.

With the regulation of wages the state had no better success. In the medieval cities, when the distinction between masters and

apprentices or journeymen became more and more apparent in the fifteenth century, unions of apprentices (Gesellen-verbände), occasionally assuming an international character, were opposed to the unions of masters and merchants. Now it was the state which undertook to settle their griefs, and under the Elizabethan Statute of 1563 the Justices of Peace had to settle the wages, so as to guarantee a 'convenient' livelihood to journeymen and apprentices. The Justices, however, proved helpless to conciliate the conflicting interests, and still less to compel the masters to obey their decisions. The law gradually became a dead letter, and was repealed by the end of the eighteenth century.

But while the state thus abandoned the function of regulating wages, it continued severely to prohibit all combinations which were entered upon by journeymen and workers in order to raise their wages, or to keep them at a certain level. All through the eighteenth century it legislated against the workers' unions, and in 1799 it finally prohibited all sorts of combinations, under the menace of severe punishments. In fact, the British parliament only followed in this case the example of the French Revolutionary Convention, which had issued a draconic law against coalitions of workers – coalitions between a number of citizens being considered as attempts against the sovereignty of the state, which was supposed equally to protect all its subjects.

The work of destruction of the medieval unions was thus completed. Both in the town and in the village the state reigned over loose aggregations of individuals, and was ready to prevent by the most stringent measures the reconstitution of any sort of separate unions among them. These were, then, the conditions under which the mutual-aid tendency had to make its way in the nineteenth century.

Need it be said that no such measures could destroy that tendency? Throughout the eighteenth century, the workers' unions were continually reconstituted. Nor were they stopped by the cruel prosecutions which took place under the laws of 1797 and 1799. Every flaw in supervision, every delay of the masters in denouncing the unions was taken advantage of.

sewing machine and continually sews for others, without ever accepting any remuneration, although she has herself five children and her husband to look after... And so on."

For every one who has any idea of the life of the labouring classes it is evident that without mutual aid being practised among them on a large scale they never could pull through all their difficulties. It is only by chance that a worker's family can live its lifetime without having to face such circumstances as the crisis described by the ribbon weaver, Joseph Gutteridge, in his autobiography. And if all do not go to the ground in such cases, they owe it to mutual help. In Gutteridge's case it was an old nurse, miserably poor herself, who turned up at the moment when the family was slipping towards a final catastrophe, and brought in some bread, coal, and bedding, which she had obtained on credit. In other cases, it will be some one else, or the neighbours will take steps to save the family. But without some aid from other poor, how many more would be brought every year to irreparable ruin!⁸

Personal aid

Samuel Plimsoll, after he had lived for some time among the poor, on 7s. 6d. a week, was compelled to recognise that the kindly feelings he took with him when he began this life "changed into hearty respect and admiration" when he saw how the relations between the poor are permeated with mutual aid and support, and learned the simple ways in which that support is given. After a many years' experience, his conclusion was that "when you come to think of it, such as these men were, so were the vast majority of the working classes." As to bringing up orphans, even by the poorest families, it is so widely spread a habit, that it may be described as a general rule; thus among the miners it was found, after the two explosions at Warren Vale and at Lund Hill, that "nearly one-third of the men killed, as the respective committees can testify, were thus supporting relations other than wife and child." "Have you reflected," Mr. Plimsoll added, "what this is? Rich men, even comfortably-to-

"If, in the working classes, they would not help each other, they could not exist. I know families which continually help each other – with money, with food, with fuel, for bringing up the little children, in cases of illness, in cases of death.

"The 'mine' and 'thine' is much less sharply observed among the poor than among the rich. Shoes, dress, hats, and so on – what may be wanted on the spot – are continually borrowed from each other, also all sorts of household things.

"Last winter the members of the United Radical Club had brought together some little money, and began after Christmas to distribute free soup and bread to the children going to school. Gradually they had 1,800 children to attend to. The money came from outsiders, but all the work was done by the members of the club. Some of them, who were out of work, came at four in the morning to wash and to peel the vegetables; five women came at nine or ten (after having done their own household work) for cooking, and stayed till six or seven to wash the dishes. And at meal time, between twelve and half-past one, twenty to thirty workers came in to aid in serving the soup, each one staying what he could spare of his meal time. This lasted for two months. No one was paid."

My friend also mentions various individual cases, of which the following are typical:

"Annie W. was given by her mother to be boarded by an old person in Wilmot Street. When her mother died, the old woman, who herself was very poor, kept the child without being paid a penny for that. When the old lady died too, the child, who was five years old, was of course neglected during her illness, and was ragged; but she was taken at once by Mrs S, the wife of a shoemaker, who herself has six children. Lately, when the husband was ill, they had not much to eat, all of them.

"The other day, Mrs M, mother of six children, attended Mrs M–g throughout her illness, and took to her own rooms the elder child... But do you need such facts? They are quite general... I know also Mrs. D (Oval, Hackney Road), who has a

Under the cover of friendly societies, burial clubs, or secret brotherhoods, the unions spread in the textile industries, among the Sheffield cutlers, the miners, and vigorous federal organisations were formed to support the branches during strikes and prosecutions.

The repeal of the Combination Laws in 1825 gave a new impulse to the movement. Unions and national federations were formed in all trades¹; and when Robert Owen started his Grand National Consolidated Trades' Union, it mustered half a million members in a few months. True that this period of relative liberty did not last long. Prosecution began anew in the thirties, and the well-known ferocious condemnations of 1832-1844 followed. The Grand National Union was disbanded, and all over the country, both the private employers and the government in its own workshops began to compel the workers to resign all connection with unions, and to sign 'the Document' to that effect. Unionists were prosecuted wholesale under the Master and Servant Act – workers being summarily arrested and condemned upon a mere complaint of misbehaviour lodged by the master.

Strikes were suppressed in an autocratic way, and the most astounding condemnations took place for merely having announced a strike or acted as a delegate in it – to say nothing of the military suppression of strike riots, nor of the condemnations which followed the frequent outbursts of acts of violence. To practise mutual support under such circumstances was anything but an easy task. And yet, notwithstanding all obstacles, of which our own generation hardly can have an idea, the revival of the unions began again in 1841, and the amalgamation of the workers has been steadily continued since.

After a long fight, which lasted for over a hundred years, the right of combining together was conquered, and at the present time nearly one-fourth part of the regularly-employed workers, i.e. about 1,500,000, belong to trade unions.²

Mutual aid in strikes

As to the other European states, sufficient to say that up to a very recent date, all sorts of unions were prosecuted as conspiracies; and that nevertheless they exist everywhere, even though they must often take the form of secret societies; while the extension and the force of labour organisations, and especially of the Knights of Labour, in the United States and in Belgium, have been sufficiently illustrated by strikes in the nineties. It must, however, be borne in mind that, prosecution apart, the mere fact of belonging to a labour union implies considerable sacrifices in money, in time, and in unpaid work, and continually implies the risk of losing employment for the mere fact of being a unionist.³

There is, moreover, the strike, which a unionist has continually to face; and the grim reality of a strike is, that the limited credit of a worker's family at the baker's and the pawnbroker's is soon exhausted, the strike-pay goes not far even for food, and hunger is soon written on the children's faces. For one who lives in close contact with workers, a protracted strike is the most heartrending sight; while what a strike meant forty years ago in this country, and still means in all but the wealthiest parts of the continent, can easily be conceived. Continually, even now, strikes will end with the total ruin and the forced emigration of whole populations, while the shooting down of strikers on the slightest provocation, or even without any provocation, is quite habitual still on the continent.

And yet, every year there are thousands of strikes and lock-outs in Europe and America – the most severe and protracted contests being, as a rule, the so-called ‘sympathy strikes’, which are entered upon to support locked-out comrades or to maintain the rights of the unions. And while a portion of the press is prone to explain strikes by ‘intimidation’, those who have lived among strikers speak with admiration of the mutual aid and support which are constantly practised by them. Every one has heard of the colossal amount of work which was done by volunteer workers for organising relief during the London

join their mates outdoors. How many of the children whose playgrounds are the pavements around ‘model workers’ dwellings’, or the quays and bridges of the canals, would be crushed to death by the carts or drowned in the muddy waters, were it not for that sort of mutual support. And when a fair Jack has made a slip into the unprotected ditch at the back of the milkman's yard, or a cherry-cheeked Lizzie has, after all, tumbled down into the canal, the young brood raises such cries that all the neighbourhood is on the alert and rushes to the rescue.

Then comes in the alliance of the mothers. ‘You could not imagine’ (a woman doctor who lives in a poor neighbourhood told me lately) ‘how much they help each other. If a woman has prepared nothing, or could prepare nothing, for the baby which she expected – and how often that happens! – all the neighbours bring something for the newcomer. One of the neighbours always takes care of the children, and some other always drops in to take care of the household, so long as the mother is in bed.’

This habit is general. It is mentioned by all those who have lived among the poor. In a thousand small ways the mothers support each other and bestow their care upon children that are not their own. Some training – good or bad, let them decide it for themselves – is required in a lady of the richer classes to render her able to pass by a shivering and hungry child in the street without noticing it. But the mothers of the poorer classes have not that training. They cannot stand the sight of a hungry child; they must feed it, and so they do. “When the school children beg bread, they seldom or rather never meet with a refusal” – a lady-friend, who has worked several years in Whitechapel in connection with a workers’ club, writes to me. But I may, perhaps, as well transcribe a few more passages from her letter:

“Nursing neighbours, in cases of illness, without any shade of remuneration, is quite general among the workers. Also, when a woman has little children, and goes out for work, another mother always takes care of them.

All these facts show that a reckless prosecution of personal interests, with no regard to other people's needs, is not the only characteristic of modern life. By the side of this current which so proudly claims leadership in human affairs, we perceive a hard struggle sustained by both the rural and industrial populations in order to reintroduce standing institutions of mutual aid and support; and we discover, in all classes of society, a widely spread movement towards the establishment of an infinite variety of more or less permanent institutions for the same purpose. But when we pass from public life to the private life of the modern individual, we discover another extremely wide world of mutual aid and support, which only passes unnoticed by most sociologists because it is limited to the narrow circle of the family and personal friendship.

Mutual aid in slum-life

Under the present social system, all bonds of union among the inhabitants of the same street or neighbourhood have been dissolved. In the richer parts of the large towns, people live without knowing who are their next-door neighbours. But in the crowded lanes people know each other perfectly, and are continually brought into mutual contact. Of course, petty quarrels go their course, in the lanes as elsewhere; but groupings in accordance with personal affinities grow up, and within their circle mutual aid is practised to an extent of which the richer classes have no idea.

If we take, for instance, the children of a poor neighbourhood who play in a street or churchyard, or on a green, we notice at once that a close union exists among them, notwithstanding the temporary fights, and that that union protects them from all sorts of misfortunes. As soon as a mite bends inquisitively over the opening of a drain – ‘Don't stop there’, another mite shouts out, ‘fever sits in the hole!’ ‘Don't climb over that wall, the train will kill you if you tumble down! Don't come near to the ditch! Don't eat those berries – poison! you will die.’

Such are the first teachings imparted to the urchin when they

dock-labourers' strike; of the miners who, after having themselves been idle for many weeks, paid a levy of four shillings a week to the strike fund when they resumed work; of the miner widow who, during the Yorkshire labour war of 1894, brought her husband's life savings to the strike fund; of the last loaf of bread being always shared with neighbours; of the Radstock miners, favoured with larger kitchen-gardens, who invited four hundred Bristol miners to take their share of cabbage and potatoes, and so on.

All newspaper correspondents, during the great strike of miners in Yorkshire in 1894, knew heaps of such facts, although not all of them could report such ‘irrelevant’ matters to their respective papers.

Free associations for various purposes

Unionism is not, however, the only form in which the worker's need of mutual support finds its expression. There are, besides, the political associations, whose activity many workers consider as more conducive to general welfare than the trade-unions, limited as they are now in their purposes. Of course the mere fact of belonging to a political body cannot be taken as a manifestation of the mutual-aid tendency. We all know that politics are the field in which the purely egotistic elements of society enter into the most entangled combinations with altruistic aspirations. But every experienced politician knows that all great political movements were fought upon large and often distant issues, and that those of them were the strongest which provoked most disinterested enthusiasm.

All great historical movements have had this character, and for our own generation socialism stands in that case. ‘Paid agitators’ is, no doubt, the favourite refrain of those who know nothing about it. The truth, however, is that – to speak only of what I know personally – if I had kept a diary for the last twenty-four years and inscribed in it all the devotion and self-sacrifice which I came across in the socialist movement, the reader of such a diary would have had the word ‘heroism’

constantly on his lips. But the men I would have spoken of were not heroes; they were average men, inspired by a grand idea.

Every socialist newspaper – and there are hundreds of them in Europe alone – has the same history of years of sacrifice without any hope of reward, and, in the overwhelming majority of cases, even without any personal ambition. I have seen families living without knowing what would be their food tomorrow, the husband boycotted all round in his little town for his part in the paper, and the wife supporting the family by sewing, and such a situation lasting for years, until the family would retire, without a word of reproach, simply saying: ‘Continue; we can hold on no more!’ I have seen people, dying from consumption, and knowing it, and yet knocking about in snow and fog to prepare meetings, speaking at meetings within a few weeks from death, and only then retiring to the hospital with the words: ‘Now, friends, I am done; the doctors say I have but a few weeks to live. Tell the comrades that I shall be happy if they come to see me’.

I have seen facts which would be described as ‘idealisation’ if I told them in this place; and the very names of these people, hardly known outside a narrow circle of friends, will soon be forgotten when the friends, too, have passed away.

In fact, I don't know myself which most to admire, the unbounded devotion of these few, or the sum total of petty acts of devotion of the great number. Every quire of a penny paper sold, every meeting, every hundred votes which are won at a socialist election, represent an amount of energy and sacrifices of which no outsider has the faintest idea. And what is now done by socialists has been done in every popular and advanced party, political and religious, in the past. All past progress has been promoted by like persons and by a like devotion.

Cooperatives

Cooperation, especially in Britain, is often described as ‘joint-stock individualism’; and such as it is now, it undoubtedly tends to breed a cooperative egotism, not only towards the community at large, but also among the cooperators

become international, and they undoubtedly contribute, to an extent which cannot yet be fully appreciated, to break down the screens erected by states between different nationalities. Notwithstanding the jealousies which are bred by commercial competition, and the provocations to hatred which are sounded by the ghosts of a decaying past, there is a conscience of international solidarity which is growing both among the leading spirits of the world and the masses of the workers, since they also have conquered the right of international intercourse; and in the preventing of a European war during the last quarter of a century, this spirit has undoubtedly had its share.

The religious charitable associations, which again represent a whole world, certainly must be mentioned in this place. There is not the slightest doubt that the great bulk of their members are moved by the same mutual aid feelings which are common to all humankind. Unhappily the religious teachers of people prefer to ascribe to such feelings a supernatural origin. Many of them pretend that people do not consciously obey the mutual aid inspiration so long as they have not been enlightened by the teachings of the special religion which they represent, and, with St. Augustin, most of them do not recognise such feelings in the ‘pagan savage’.

Moreover, while early Christianity, like all other religions, was an appeal to the broadly human feelings of mutual aid and sympathy, the Christian church has aided the state in wrecking all standing institutions of mutual aid and support which were anterior to it, or developed outside of it; and, instead of the mutual aid which every savage considers as due to his kinfolk, it has preached charity which bears a character of inspiration from above, and, accordingly, implies a certain superiority of the giver upon the receiver. With this limitation, and without any intention to give offence to those who consider themselves as a body elect when they accomplish acts simply humane, we certainly may consider the immense numbers of religious charitable associations as an outcome of the same mutual aid tendency.

that the distinctions of birth, political parties and creeds are smoothed to some extent by such associations; while in the smaller and remote towns the scientific, geographical, or musical societies, especially those of them which appeal to a larger circle of amateurs, become small centres of intellectual life, a sort of link between the little spot and the wide world, and a place where men of very different conditions meet on a footing of equality. To fully appreciate the value of such centres, one ought to know them, say, in Siberia.

As to the countless educational societies which only now begin to break down the state's and the church's monopoly in education, they are sure to become before long the leading power in that branch. To the 'Froebel Unions' we already owe the kindergarten system; and to a number of formal and informal educational associations we owe the high standard of women's education in Russia, although all the time these societies and groups had to act in strong opposition to a powerful government⁶. As to the various pedagogical societies in Germany, it is well known that they have done the best part in the working out of the modern methods of teaching science in popular schools. In such associations the teacher finds also his best support. How miserable the overworked and underpaid village teacher would have been without their aid!⁷

All these associations, societies, brotherhoods, alliances, institutes, and so on, which must now be counted by the ten thousand in Europe alone, and each of which represents an immense amount of voluntary, unambitious, and unpaid or underpaid work – what are they but so many manifestations, under an infinite variety of aspects, of the same ever-living tendency of people towards mutual aid and support? For nearly three centuries people were prevented from joining hands even for literary, artistic, and educational purposes. Societies could only be formed under the protection of the state, or the church, or as secret brotherhoods, like free masonry. But now that the resistance has been broken, they swarm in all directions, they extend over all multifarious branches of human activity, they

themselves. It is, nevertheless, certain that at its origin the movement had an essentially mutual aid character. Even now, its most ardent promoters are persuaded that cooperation leads humankind to a higher harmonic stage of economical relations, and it is not possible to stay in some of the strongholds of cooperation in the North without realising that the great number of the rank and file hold the same opinion. Most of them would lose interest in the movement if that faith were gone; and it must be owned that within the last few years broader ideals of general welfare and of the producers' solidarity have begun to be current among the cooperators. There is undoubtedly now a tendency towards establishing better relations between the owners of the cooperative workshops and the workers.

The importance of cooperation in this country, in Holland and in Denmark is well known; while in Germany, and especially on the Rhine, the cooperative societies are already an important factor of industrial life⁴. It is, however, Russia which offers perhaps the best field for the study of cooperation under an infinite variety of aspects. In Russia, it is a natural growth, an inheritance from the middle ages; and while a formally established cooperative society would have to cope with many legal difficulties and official suspicion, the informal cooperation – the *artél* – makes the very substance of Russian peasant life.

The history of 'the making of Russia', and of the colonisation of Siberia, is a history of the hunting and trading *artéls* or guilds, followed by village communities, and at the present time we find the *artél* everywhere; among each group of ten to fifty peasants who come from the same village to work at a factory, in all the building trades, among fishermen and hunters, among convicts on their way to and in Siberia, among railway porters, exchange messengers, customs house labourers, everywhere in the village industries, which give occupation to 7,000,000 men – from top to bottom of the working world, permanent and temporary, for production and

consumption under all possible aspects. Until now, many of the fishing-grounds on the tributaries of the Caspian Sea are held by immense artéls, the Ural river belonging to the whole of the Ural Cossacks, who allot and re-allot the fishing-grounds – perhaps the richest in the world – among the villages, without any interference of the authorities. Fishing is always made by artéls in the Ural, the Volga, and all the lakes of Northern Russia.

Besides these permanent organisations, there are the simply countless temporary artéls, constituted for each special purpose. When ten or twenty peasants come from some locality to a big town, to work as weavers, carpenters, masons, boat-builders, and so on, they always constitute an artél. They hire rooms, hire a cook (very often the wife of one of them acts in this capacity), elect an elder, and take their meals in common, each one paying his share for food and lodging to the artél. A party of convicts on its way to Siberia always does the same, and its elected elder is the officially-recognised intermediary between the convicts and the military chief of the party. In the hard-labour prisons they have the same organisation.

The railway porters, the messengers at the exchange, the workers at the custom house, the town messengers in the capitals, who are collectively responsible for each member, enjoy such a reputation that any amount of money or bank-notes is trusted to the artél member by the merchants. In the building trades, artéls of from 10 to 200 members are formed; and the serious builders and railway contractors always prefer to deal with an artél than with separately-hired workers. The last attempts of the Ministry of War to deal directly with productive artéls, formed ad hoc in the domestic trades, and to give them orders for boots and all sorts of brass and iron goods, are described as most satisfactory; while the renting of a Crown iron works, (Votkinsk) to an artél of workers, which took place seven or eight years ago, has been a decided success.

We can thus see in Russia how the old medieval institution, having not been interfered with by the state (in its informal

a standing friendship has been established. The Kegelbrüder, the Brothers of the Nine Pins, in Germany, are a similar association; so also the gymnasts' societies (300,000 members in Germany), the informal brotherhood of paddlers in France, the yacht clubs, and so on. Such associations certainly do not alter the economical stratification of society, but, especially in the small towns, they contribute to smooth social distinctions, and as they all tend to join in large national and international federations, they certainly aid the growth of personal friendly intercourse between all sorts of people scattered in different parts of the globe.

The Alpine Clubs, the Jagdschutzverein in Germany, which has over 100,000 members – hunters, educated foresters, zoologists, and simple lovers of nature – and the International Ornithological Society, which includes zoologists, breeders, and simple peasants in Germany, have the same character. Not only have they done in a few years a large amount of very useful work, which large associations alone could do properly (maps, refuge huts, mountain roads; studies of animal life, of noxious insects, of migrations of birds, and so on), but they create new bonds between people. Two alpinists of different nationalities who meet in a refuge hut in the Caucasus, or the professor and the peasant ornithologist who stay in the same house, are no more strangers to each other; while the Uncle Toby's Society at Newcastle, which has already induced over 260,000 boys and girls never to destroy birds' nests and to be kind to all animals, has certainly done more for the development of human feelings and of taste in natural science than lots of moralists and most of our schools.

We cannot omit, even in this rapid review, the thousands of scientific, literary, artistic, and educational societies. Up till now, the scientific bodies, closely controlled and often subsidised by the state, have generally moved in a very narrow circle, and they often came to be looked upon as mere openings for getting state appointments, while the very narrowness of their circles undoubtedly bred petty jealousies. Still it is a fact

human nature is sin, and that all good in people has a supernatural origin, that they mostly ignore the facts which cannot be produced as an example of higher inspiration or grace, coming from above. And as to the lay-writers, their attention is chiefly directed towards one sort of heroism, the heroism which promotes the idea of the state. Therefore, they admire the Roman hero, or the soldier in the battle, while they pass by the fisherman's heroism, hardly paying attention to it.

The poet and the painter might, of course, be taken by the beauty of the human heart in itself; but both seldom know the life of the poorer classes, and while they can sing or paint the Roman or the military hero in conventional surroundings, they can neither sing nor paint impressively the hero who acts in those modest surroundings which they ignore. If they venture to do so, they produce a mere piece of rhetoric.⁵

Countless societies for combined action under all possible aspects

The countless societies, clubs, and alliances, for the enjoyment of life, for study and research, for education, and so on, which have lately grown up in such numbers that it would require many years to simply tabulate them, are another manifestation of the same ever working tendency for association and mutual support.

Some of them, like the broods of young birds of different species which come together in the autumn, are entirely given to share in common the joys of life. Every village in this country, in Switzerland, Germany, and so on, has its cricket, football, tennis, nine-pins, pigeon, musical or singing clubs. Other societies are much more numerous, and some of them, like the Cyclists' Alliance, have suddenly taken a formidable development. Although the members of this alliance have nothing in common but the love of cycling, there is already among them a sort of freemasonry for mutual help, especially in the remote nooks and corners which are not flooded by cyclists; they look upon the CAC – the Cyclists' Alliance Club – in a village as a sort of home; and at the yearly cyclists' camp many

manifestations), has fully survived until now, and takes the greatest variety of forms in accordance with the requirements of modern industry and commerce. As to the Balkan peninsula, the Turkish Empire and Caucasia, the old guilds are maintained there in full. The *esnafs* of Serbia have fully preserved their medieval character; they include both masters and journeymen, regulate the trades, and are institutions for mutual support in labour and sickness; while the *amkari* of Caucasia, and especially at Tiflis, add to these functions a considerable influence in municipal life.

In connection with cooperation, I ought perhaps to mention also the friendly societies, the unities of oddfellows, the village and town clubs organised for meeting the doctors' bills, the dress and burial clubs, the small clubs very common among factory girls, to which they contribute a few pence every week, and afterwards draw by lot the sum of one pound, which can at least be used for some substantial purchase, and many others. A not inconsiderable amount of sociable or jovial spirit is alive in all such societies and clubs, even though the 'credit and debit' of each member are closely watched over. But there are so many associations based on the readiness to sacrifice time, health, and life if required, that we can produce numbers of illustrations of the best forms of mutual support.

Self-sacrifice

The Lifeboat Association in this country, and similar institutions on the Continent, must be mentioned in the first place. The former has now over three hundred boats along the coasts of these isles, and it would have twice as many were it not for the poverty of the fishers, who cannot afford to buy lifeboats. The crews consist, however, of volunteers, whose readiness to sacrifice their lives for the rescue of absolute strangers to them is put every year to a severe test; every winter the loss of several of the bravest among them stands on record.

And if we ask these men what moves them to risk their lives, even when there is no reasonable chance of success, their

answer is something on the following lines. A fearful snowstorm, blowing across the Channel, raged on the flat, sandy coast of a tiny village in Kent, and a small smack, laden with oranges, stranded on the sands near by. In these shallow waters only a flat-bottomed lifeboat of a simplified type can be kept, and to launch it during such a storm was to face an almost certain disaster. And yet the men went out, fought for hours against the wind, and the boat capsized twice. One man was drowned, the others were cast ashore. One of these last, a refined coastguard, was found next morning, badly bruised and half frozen in the snow. I asked him, how they came to make that desperate attempt? "I don't know myself", was his reply.

"There was the wreck; all the people from the village stood on the beach, and all said it would be foolish to go out; we never should work through the surf. We saw five or six men clinging to the mast, making desperate signals. We all felt that something must be done, but what could we do? One hour passed, two hours, and we all stood there. We all felt most uncomfortable. Then, all of a sudden, through the storm, it seemed to us as if we heard their cries – they had a boy with them. We could not stand that any longer. All at once we said, "We must go!" The women said so too; they would have treated us as cowards if we had not gone, although next day they said we had been fools to go. As one man, we rushed to the boat, and went. The boat capsized, but we took hold of it. The worst was to see the poor man drowning by the side of the boat, and we could do nothing to save him. Then came a fearful wave, the boat capsized again, and we were cast ashore. The men were still rescued by the D. boat, ours was caught miles away. I was found next morning in the snow."

The same feeling moved also the miners of the Rhonda Valley, when they worked for the rescue of their comrades from the inundated mine. They had pierced through thirty-two yards of coal in order to reach their entombed comrades; but when only three yards more remained to be pierced, fire-damp enveloped them. The lamps went out, and the rescue men retired. To work

in such conditions was to risk being blown up at every moment. But the raps of the entombed miners were still heard, the men were still alive and appealed for help, and several miners volunteered to work at any risk; and as they went down the mine, their wives had only silent tears to follow them – not one word to stop them.

There is the gist of human psychology. Unless men are maddened in the battlefield, they 'cannot stand it' to hear appeals for help, and not to respond to them. The hero goes; and what the hero does, all feel that they ought to have done as well. The sophisms of the brain cannot resist the mutual aid feeling, because this feeling has been nurtured by thousands of years of human social life and hundreds of thousands of years of pre-human life in societies.

'But what about those men who were drowned in the Serpentine in the presence of a crowd, out of which no one moved for their rescue?' it may be asked. 'What about the child which fell into the Regent's Park Canal – also in the presence of a holiday crowd – and was only saved through the presence of mind of a maid who let out a Newfoundland dog to the rescue?' The answer is plain enough. People are the result of both their inherited instincts and their education. Among the miners and the seafarers, their common occupations and their every day contact with one another create a feeling of solidarity, while the surrounding dangers maintain courage and pluck. In the cities, on the contrary, the absence of common interest nurtures indifference, while courage and pluck, which seldom find their opportunities, disappear, or take another direction.

Moreover, the tradition of the hero of the mine and the sea lives in the miners' and fishers' villages, adorned with a poetical halo. But what are the traditions of a motley London crowd? The only tradition they might have in common ought to be created by literature, but a literature which would correspond to the village epics hardly exists.

The clergy are so anxious to prove that all that comes from
