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"By Little and Little": The Idea of Progress in Sixteenth- Century England

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"BY LITTLE AND LITTLE:"
THE IDEA OF PROGRESS IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

A Thesis

Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by
Norton Scott Amos

1986

APPROVAL SHEET

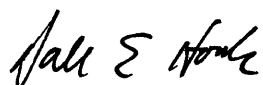
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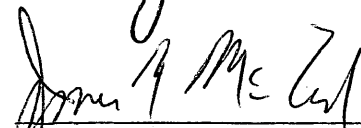
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ABSTRACT

It has been a commonplace that the idea of progress grew out of the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century. In fact, pre-scientific intimations of this idea can be found among humanists and reformers in sixteenth-century England. Desiderius Erasmus and Thomas More had a vague conception of man's potential for perfectibility, but they saw in history only decline and degeneracy. Juan Luis Vives and Thomas Starkey both posited a theory of man's rise from primitive savagery to civilized society, "by little and little." They believed in man's educability, and that through individual perfection society can attain perfection. For Starkey in particular, the mutability of human law and its potential for improvement was integral to his conception of progress, a belief shared by Richard Hooker.

To a much lesser extent, the concept that meaningful development and change are a possibility can be found in the apologetics of the ecclesiastics charged with the defense of the *Via Media*, especially in the work of John Whitgift. Early Protestants held to an ecclesiastical version of history as a decline from a golden age. Whitgift, in defending church institutions, argued that there was room for change and growth, for development in the church. It is in the work of Richard Hooker that the thought of Vives and Starkey is combined with that of Whitgift, and it is in his work that is found the fullest expression of the idea of progress in sixteenth-century England.

"BY LITTLE AND LITTLE:"

THE IDEA OF PROGRESS IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

INTRODUCTION

The sixteenth century was an age of intellectual ferment during which were born ideas that would decisively shape the form of modern Europe. Among them was the idea of progress which, while it did not fully emerge for nearly two hundred years, had its genesis in a group of related ideas that entered the dialogue of learned men at this time. It has in the past been generally agreed that the modern formulation of the idea of progress had its origin in the seventeenth century with the rise of science. Subsequently, the concept became so entwined with science that most thinking concerning the origins of the idea became colored by scientific considerations to the exclusion of other sources. It has been remarked that "most students of the idea of progress point to modern science as the enterprise which did most to achieve the ascendancy and unfold the meaning of human progress," and this led them to predetermine "who would play the hero in their writing, and how the hero would sweep to victory along a unilinear path of development, before they ever set pen to paper."¹ Since the wedding of Progress to Evolution in the nineteenth century, it has become impossible to speak of the former apart from science, and in fact the idea of progress

has itself become something of a scientific proposition.

Not all the sources of the idea of progress were in science, though, nor are all to be found in historiography, despite the fact that the idea is an explanation of the human past. This is certainly not to say that these two, history and science, are of no importance to the origin of progress, but there was in the sixteenth century speculation tending towards the idea of progress apart from them.

Progress, as the term shall henceforth be used, is "the idea. . .that mankind has advanced in the past--from some aboriginal condition of primitiveness, barbarism, or even nullity--is now advancing, and will continue to advance through the foreseeable future."² While the notion was rarely, if ever, stated in terms as explicit as this, the concept does encompass several components which can be found in literature of this time. There is the notion of the perfectibility of man through education, the idea that with proper training man can realize his potential. Allied with this is a belief in a "slow, gradual, and cumulative improvement in knowledge."³ Also a part of the idea of progress is the belief that society has risen to a higher level of civilization from its primitive beginnings. Finally, there are the related notions that human law is subject to change and improvement and that institutions are likewise subject to the same change and improvement. Common to all of these is the notion of gradualness,

that things unfold over an extended period of time, and the notion of linear continuity. All of these together embody the idea of progress.

In the work of Richard Hooker (1554-1600), perhaps the finest mind produced by England in the sixteenth century, can be found these elements of the idea of progress. In his Of the Lawes of Ecclesiasticall Polity (Books I-IV, 1593; Book V, 1597), is the fullest and most nearly explicit expression of the idea of progress as it had developed to that time, and coming as he did at century's end, his work was the summation of a stream of thought that had begun in the Henrician era with Juan Luis Vives (1492-1540) and Thomas Starkey (c. 1495-1538) and in the work of the apologists for the Via Media, especially John Whitgift (1530-1603). While it is an idea intimately related to history, in England it was developed not so much by historians as by humanists concerned with education and society and given its fullest expression by a theologian charged with the defense of the established church.

CHAPTER I

ENGLISH HUMANISM AND THE IDEA OF PROGRESS

The humanist attitude towards education embodied a belief in the educability of man, a belief that environment played a significant role in the shaping of a man's mind, and a belief that nothing in man was so rooted that it could not be corrected through education. Coupled with these beliefs was the idea that man's rational nature allowed him to shape, by education, his environment. What was a significant factor, though, one which separated the sixteenth-century humanist from the eighteenth-century philosopher was the unwillingness of the former to jettison Christian beliefs, which proved to be an obstacle to the latter when the modern idea of progress was formulated.¹ While the amelioration of the human condition was considered possible, it was not viewed as either continuous or even necessary. How man used the gifts with which he was endowed determined his progress, and to most the history of man in this regard provided little encouragement to optimism.²

European humanists as a whole looked to education as the key to man's improvement, relying on the notion

of man as fundamentally a rational being.³ The belief was that men had three distinctions that set them apart from animals. Man has within his nature implanted the virtue of driving towards perfection. Where animals have instincts, man has reason which allows him to reach for perfection. Finally, man has a need for gathering into society with other humans.⁴ Taken together, these concepts provided a seedbed for the growth of an optimistic view concerning man's ascent to civilization.

Any discussion of humanism in England must include Desiderius Erasmus (c. 1466-1535) and Thomas More (1475-1535) even though neither can really be considered a proponent of the idea of progress in any more than a half-hearted way. Certainly, in the works of Erasmus one can find much that appears to presage the idea of progress. With the majority of humanists Erasmus believed in the educability of man, and that man could through education be improved. Men were, he felt, moulded by education not birth--"homines non nascuntur, sed finguntur."⁵ Heredity does not play a role, nor natural differences that occur between men. Any disparity that exists can be overcome through the agency of education, an agency to which he attributes much power. It is through the ratio in man that Erasmus believes education to find its power, and once man has received the proper education, the enlightened reason will become his guiding

principle and will allow him to attain perfection through it.⁶ Through nature, training, and practice, man can achieve individual progress.

By Nature, I mean partly innate capacity for being trained, partly native bent towards excellence. By Training, I mean the skilled application of instruction and guidance. By Practice, the free exercise on our own part of that activity which has been implanted by and is furthered by Training. Nature without skilled training must be imperfect, and Practice without the method which Training supplies leads to hopeless confusion.⁷

Erasmus felt that God endowed all men with free will, and thus there is no ingrained badness within man that cannot be corrected by reason. He laid on Christian society the responsibility to instruct all members to attain perfection through education and reason.⁸

Yet Erasmus did not find that there was any real progress in human history--he only believed that individual progress was a possibility, through man's potential for improvement through education, a belief he held in common with Thomas More. As with Erasmus, much that More wrote indicated at least a belief in the possibility of individual progress, and he allowed that social progress was theoretically possible. In his most famous work, Utopia (1516), More describes how Utopus chose not to institute a perfect state, but left it incomplete so that things could

develop through the course of time.

They say that in the beginning the whole city was planned by King Utopus himself, but that he left to posterity matters of adornment and improvement, such as could not be perfected in one man's lifetime.⁹

Utopians were open to history and found that it provided various revelations. Through it they saw the potential for scientific development, and they believed history was also the revealer of the nature of truth, which they felt comes forth by its own strength through time.¹⁰ More shows in Utopia "that the tribulatory imperfection of human nature itself similarly induces-- or should induce--creative effort, social as well as individual, to mitigate its effects." History, to Utopians, "shows what might be achieved, in the context of what cannot."¹¹

More seemed to attack those of his contemporaries who stubbornly held to received customs rather than accept change that would lead to progress. In response to More's suggestion that he could do immense good as a public servant, Hythloday responds negatively.

Now in a court composed of people who envy everyone else and admire only themselves, if a man should suggest something he had read of in other ages or seen in other places, the other counsellors would think their reputation for wisdom was endangered, and they would look like simpletons, unless

they could find fault with his proposal. If all else failed, they would take refuge in some remark like this: 'The way we're doing it is the way we've always done it, this custom was good enough for our fathers, and I hope we're as wise as they were.' And with this deep thought they would take their seats, as though they had said the last word on the subject--implying, forsooth, that it would be a very dangerous matter if a man were found to be wiser in any point than his forefathers were. As a matter of fact, we quietly neglect the best examples they have left us; but if something better is proposed, we seize the excuse of reverence for times past and cling to it desperately.¹²

More even cautiously suggests that the accomplishments of his own age and nation are not to be despised, using Peter Giles as his mouthpiece.

'You will have a hard time persuading me' said Peter Giles, 'that people in that new land are better governed than in the world we know. Our minds are not inferior to theirs, and our government, I believe, is older. Long experience has helped us develop many conveniences of life, and by good luck we have discovered many other things which human ingenuity could never hit on.'¹³

Nevertheless, More had little faith in progress as a fact. His Augustinianism never allowed him to believe that history would ever lead to the world that was the dream of humanist philosophers.¹⁴ His History of King Richard III (c. 1514) shows history to be a dramatic continuum where perfection cannot be attained by men, yet they must strive for it or be engulfed by

evil.¹⁵ The world was in no way perfectible because of the eternal conflict between good and evil within human nature.¹⁶ More concluded from biblical history that man's condition was ever the same despite changing circumstances.¹⁷ In the end, More saw Providence, not Progress, as the moving force in history. Man's nature of itself leads to degeneration, but God's Providence has throughout history prevented chaos from becoming complete. More found in history a basic rhythm of decline and then providential renewal.¹⁸ More's view of history and the possibilities of progress thus changed little from the time he composed an epigram dedicated to Henry VIII.

Plato foretold that everything which any particular time can produce had often existed and would often sometime in the future exist again. 'As spring is banished and returns with the swift passage of the year, as familiar winter after an unchanging interval returns, just so,' he said, 'after many revolutions of the speeding sky all things in their countless turn will be again.' The golden age came first, then the silver; after that the bronze, and recently the iron age. In your reign, Sire, the golden age has returned. May Plato be to this extent a true prophet.¹⁹

Though the most brilliant of luminaries, Erasmus and More were not, however, the sum of humanism in Renaissance England. The idea of progress could be found in a considerably stronger form in the work of two of the lesser humanists of this generation, Juan

Luis Vives and Thomas Starkey.

Though not as well known as Erasmus, Vives was one of the most important itinerant humanists to reside in England in this period. His chief interest was education, and it was as a lecturer in Rhetoric that he was brought by Cardinal Wolsey to Oxford.²⁰ In the words of one of his modern editors, Vives "was the Quintillian of the Renaissance, in looking forward towards the conceptions of the golden age placed in the future, not in the past; towards scientific knowledge gained, not from time-honored but obsolete authority, such as that of Aristotle and the scholastic philosophers, but from independent research and the direct interrogation of nature; and finally in looking forward to the rise and growth of separate nationalities and separate vernaculars."²¹ In this way he stands in contrast with Erasmus and More; he displays in his writings a distinct sympathy for notions that tend towards the idea of progress. He had no place for the commonly held belief that nature, as all organisms, was in a state of decay and senescence and that such was inevitable.²² He was conscious of the present and of its possibilities for future development, and we find him on "the side of the moderns against the ancients. . . ." ²³

The idea of progress is strongly evident in Vives' On the Corruption of the Arts (1531). In his

introduction he dispenses with the long held belief that everything should be taken on authority, not on independent discovery. He did not stand overawed by the ancients, for he believed "they were men as we are, and were liable to be deceived and to err." Vives maintained that "they were the first discoverers of what were only, as it were, rough and, if I may say so, shapeless blocks which they passed on to their posterity to be purified and put into shape." He asks rhetorically "would they not be themselves unwilling to pledge us not to use our own intellects in seeking to pass beyond their gifts to us." Vives insisted that the ancients would applaud the efforts of later men to surpass their own accomplishments.

The good men amongst them undoubtedly in the past stretched forth their hands in friendship to those whom they saw mounting higher in knowledge than they themselves had reached. For they judged it to be of the very essence of the human race, that, daily, it should progress in the arts, disciplines, virtue and goodness. We think ourselves men or even less, whilst we regard them as more than men, as heroes, or perhaps demi-gods-- not but what they excelled in many and great achievements.

Strong words to be written by a man of the Renaissance, the age when humanists revered the ancients as the Reformers revered the early Church. He goes on to equate his age with all previous:

So we also might no less excel in the eyes of our posterity, if we were to strive sufficiently earnestly, or we might achieve still more, since we have the advantage of what they discovered in knowledge as our basis, and can make the addition to it of what our judgment finds out.

Vives then turns and attacks a famous and time-honored aphorism:

For it is a false and fond similitude, which some writers adopt, though they think it witty and suitable, that we are, compared with the ancients, as dwarfs upon the shoulders of giants. It is not so. Neither are we dwarfs, nor they giants, but we are all of one stature, save that we are lifted up somewhat higher by their means, provided that there be found in us the same studiousness, watchfulness and love of truth, as was in them.²⁴

The ideas expressed in these passages are remarkable and they are not singular, for they reappear again in another of Vives' works, On Education (1531). He insists that his era was on the threshold of advancement, of which this would be but the most recent manifestation.

Nature is not yet so effete and exhausted as to be unable to bring forth, in our times, results comparable to those of earlier ages. She always remains equal to herself, and not rarely she comes forward more strongly and powerful than in the past, as if mustering together all her forces. So we must regard her in this present age, as re-enforced by the confirmed strength which has developed, by degrees, through so many centuries.

He again turns his criticism to those who maintain that men can at best only emulate their predecessors, nor surpass them:

For how greatly do the discoveries of earlier ages and experiences spread over long stretches of time, open up the entrance to the comprehension of the different branches of knowledge? It is therefore clear that, if we only apply our minds sufficiently, we can judge better over the whole round of life and nature than could Aristotle, Plato, or any of the ancients, who spent their energies in so prolonged an observation of the greatest and hidden things, as to bring forth in them rather the wondrous admiration of newness than fresh contributions to real knowledge.

Vives repeats his assertion that the ancients would themselves do what he urged his contemporaries to do:

Further, what was the method of Aristotle himself? Did he not dare to pluck up by the root the received opinions of his predecessors? Is it, then, to be forbidden to us to at least investigate, and to form our own opinions? Especially as Seneca wisely declares: 'Those who have been active intellectually before us, are not our masters but our leaders.' Truth stands open to all. It is not as yet taken possession of. Much of truth has been left for future generations to discover.²⁵

As with all humanists, Vives set great store by man's ability to reason, as indicated in the opening line of On Education: "Man has received from God a great gift, viz. a mind, and the power of inquiring into things; with which power he can behold not only

the present, but also cast his gaze over the past and the future."²⁶ Vives describes in the first chapter of On Education how human society gradually arose from man's at first solitary existence through the use of reason. Man first needed sustenance, which led to distinguishing between good and bad food; then clothing, followed shortly by shelter, first flimsy structures and then caves. At this point men banded together, only to split into family units which then left the cave to construct huts. At first widely scattered, these huts came to be built in groups, villages. Government now appeared of necessity, for human society came into being. Laws followed closely, then walls around the settlement and weapons for defense.²⁷ His point is that man is a social and rational being, and that this type of progression is therefore likely to continue.

Vives is not the complete optimist, however, and readily admits that while there has been progress it has not been uniform;

Nevertheless, man has wandered further out of the way than he has advanced in the way. If anyone looks at the steps he has accomplished and the results at which he has arrived, by themselves, they seem quite marvellous. If he compares them with what has yet to be attained, he must conclude that man has scarcely put his foot beyond the threshold, so few and so obscure are those facts which he possesses.²⁸

Vives clearly allows for almost limitless improvement, not only as desirable, but as possible. Knowledge is the key, and knowledge is cumulative:

In the beginning first one, then another experience through wonder at its novelty, was noted down for use in life; from a number of separate experiments the mind gathered a universal law, which, after it was further supported and confirmed by many experiments, was considered certain, and established. Then it was handed down to posterity. Other men added subject matter which tended to the same use and end. This material, collected by men of great and distinguished intellect, constituted the branches of knowledge, or the arts.²⁹

While Vives believed human perfectibility was possible, he did not separate it from religion and man's indebtedness to God:

. . .the human mind, provided with its small lamp, is not able to attain to the conception of that ultimate end, unless it has been enlightened by the end itself. . . therefore there was need of God, not only to teach us how to come to Him, but also to lead us by the hand, since we are weak, and constantly liable to fall. . . . Piety is, of all things, the most necessary for perfecting man.³⁰

In the work of Vives we find thus one of the earliest expressions of the idea of progress, remarkable for the time in which he wrote. It is all the more remarkable that historians of the idea have paid him so little notice. Vives is one of the first humanists

to have broken free of the cyclical explanation of the human past. He, like Erasmus, was in many ways a man out of his time. As one writer has observed, "in all these things--his questioning of authority, use of the inductive method, insistence on the relation of knowledge to human welfare, support for vernacular tongues--Vives points the way to the empirical materialist philosophy of the seventeenth century and the activities of those who founded the first scientific societies."³¹--and to the men who formulated the idea of progress.

Vives was a Spaniard, Erasmus a Dutchman. Though both foreigners, they exerted a tremendous influence upon English thought. Aside from Thomas More, the other English humanist whose thought has any significant bearing on the early history of the idea of progress was Thomas Starkey, a protege of Thomas Cromwell. Starkey's works were never widely circulated, and his most famous work, A Dialogue between Reginald Pole and Thomas Lupset, remained unpublished until 1871. There is considerable doubt as to the details of composition and circulation of this work as they were presented by his earlier interpreters, though it appears to have been completed in either 1531 or 1532.³²

The idea of progress is as strongly evident in Starkey's work as in Vives'. Interestingly, Aristotle

appears to be a strong determinant in their thought, as opposed to Plato, who influenced both More and Erasmus to a great degree. In "What ys pollycy aftur the sētēce of Arystotyl," Starkey describes how man once "waueryd abrode in the wyld feldys & woodys" as animals, until such time as men of wisdom led them to abandon their brute existence and build towns and establish laws. From this came different types of policy which were acceptable "in dyverse natyonys & cūtreys accordyng to the dyuersyte of the nature of the pepul in eũy cōmynalty." He defined policy as "but a certayn ordur, goũnace, & rule, wher by the multytude & the hole cōmynalty in eũy cūtrei cyte & towne, whether they be goũnyd by a prýce or cōmyn cōseyll ys euer dyrectyd, formyd, & inducyd to the ryght trade of vertue & honestye."³³ The similarity to what Vives wrote is obvious. The concept of the relativity of law is the key to Starkey's thought: "yet to thys law or that law, al men are not bounden, but only such as receyue them, and be vnder the domynyon of them, wych haue authoryte of maykyng therof." In the case of particular ecclesiastical customs governing priestly celibacy, eating fish on Friday, etc., these are laws only of custom. "And thus in infynyte other hyt ys euydent to se, how that to be obedyent to the lawys in euery cuntrey hyt ys a certayn vertue, but of that sort wych hath hys strength and powar holly of

the opynyon and consent of man."³⁴

The idea of progress is most evident in the Dialogue. He posits that individual as well as societal perfection lies in the rule of law.

For hither tendeth all prudence and policy; to bring the whole country to quietness and civility, that every man, and so the whole, may at the last attain to such perfection as by nature is to the dignity of man due, which as it seemeth resteth in the communing of all such virtues as to the dignity of man are convenient, to the profit of other, living together in civil life and politic; yea, and, as it were, in the forming of other to their natural perfection. For like as the body of man is then most perfect in his nature when it hath power to gender another like thereunto, so is the mind most perfect when it communeth and spreadeth his virtues abroad to the instruction of the other. Then it is most like unto the nature of God, Whose infinite virtue is therein most perceived, that he Communeth His goodness to all creatures: to some more, to some less, according to their nature and dignity.³⁵

Starkey is so confident in the self-evident fact of man's progress from primitivism that he brings forth the argument for a decline from a golden age, which he puts in the mouth of Reginald Pole:

You said last of all that man is born, and of nature brought forth, to a civility, and to live in politic order - the which thing to me seemeth clean contrary. For if you call this civility and living in politic order, a commanalty to live under a prince or a common counsel in cities and towns, meseemeth man should not be born thereto, forasmuch as man at the beginning lived many years without any such polity; at the which

time he lived more virtuously and more according to the dignity of his nature than he doth now in this which you call politic order and civility. . . .

Pole concludes by asserting that man in his natural state is at his happiest:

Therefore if this be civil life and order - to live in cities and towns with so much vice and disorder - meseem man should not be born therto, but rather to life in the wild forest, there more following the study of virtue, as it is said men did in the golden age wherein man lived according to his natural dignity.³⁶

Lupset responds by defending law and civil polity, civilization as it had developed and progressed, as a good thing. It is rather in man that evil and shortcoming is to be found:

But this I call the civil life, contrary; living togidder in good and politic order, one ever ready to do good to another, and as it were conspiring togidder in all virtue and honesty. This is very true and civil life; and though it be so that man abuseth the society and company of man in cities and towns, giving himself to all vice, yet we may not therefore cast down cities and towns and drive man to the woods again and wild forests wherein he lived at the first beginning, rudely. The fault whereof is nother in the cities nor towns, nother in the laws ordained therto, but is in the malice of man, which abuseth and turneth that thing which might be to his wealth and felicity to his own destruction and misery.³⁷

This allowance made for, Starkey lauds (through Lupset) the accomplishments men in society with each other have wrought, the progress that has been made.

And furthermore, plainly this thing to see, let us, as it were, out of a higher place behold and consider the wonderful works of man here upon earth, where first we shall see the goodly cities, castles and towns build for the setting forth of the politic life, pleasantly set as they were the stars upon earth, wherein we shall see also marvellous good laws, statutes and ordinances devised by man by high policy for the maintaining of the civil life. We shall see infinite strange arts and crafts, invented by man's wit for his commodity, some for pleasure and some for necessity. Further, we shall see how by his labour and diligence he hath tilled the earth and brought forth infinite fruits for his necessary food and pleasant sustenance, so that now the earth (which else should have lain like a forest rude and untilled) by the diligent labour and policy of man is brought to marvellous culture and fertility.³⁸

Good humanist that he is, it is to reason that Starkey attributes man's first rise from his primitive state, reason which man has received from his Creator, giving him a portion of divinity.

Thus, if we with ourself reason and consider the works of man here upon earth, we shall nothing doubt of his excellent dignity, but plainly affirm that he hath in him a sparkle of divinity, and is surely of a celestial and divine nature, seeing that by memory and wit also he conceiveth the nature of all things. For there is nothing here in this world, nother in heaven above, nor in earth beneath, but he by his reason comprehendeth it. So that I think we may conclude

that man by nature in excellence and dignity even so excelleth all other creatures here upon earth as God exceedeth the nature of man.³⁹

Starkey maintained "that these virtues stand not in the opinion of man, but by the benefit and power of nature in his heart are rooted and planted, inclining him to the civil life, according to the excellent dignity of his nature."⁴⁰ However much these virtues are ingrained in the character of man, his progress is not a foregone conclusion. "But here we must note that, like as in many things which by experience we daily see, nature requireth the diligence of man, leaving them unperfit of themselves, as the seeds and fruits of the ground, which she will never bring to perfection, if man withhold his diligence and labour; so in these virtues and law of nature, she requireth the aid and diligence of man, which else will soon be oppressed and corrupt." This progression to perfection is provisional and fragile: "There be in man's life so many occasions of destroying these seeds and virtues, plants and laws, that except there be joined some good provision for their springing up and good culture, they shall never bring forth their fruit, they shall never bring man to his perfection."⁴¹

What maintains the social progress that has been attained and allows for further growth are laws and customs.

Wherefore among all men and all nations, as I think, upon earth there be and ever hath been other certain customs and manners by long use and time confirmed and approved, other laws, written and devised by the politic wit of man, received and stablished for the maintenance and setting forward of these natural seeds and plants of virtue; which custom and law, by man so ordained and devised, is called the civil law, for because they be as means to bring man to perfection of the civil life. Without the ordinance of these laws, the other soon will be corrupt, the weeds will soon overgrow the good corn.

Such civil laws are both mutable and relative, varying according to particular human circumstances.

This law civil is far different from the other, for in every country it is diverse and variable, yea almost in every city and town. This law taketh effect of the opinion of man; it resteth wholly in his consent, and varieth according to the place and time, insomuch that in diverse time and place contrary laws are both good and both convenient to the politic life.

Against this mutable law, Starkey set the immutable, unchanging law of nature, upon which all other law is grounded.

Whereas the law of nature is ever one, in all countries, firm and stable, and never for the time varieth; it is never changeable; the consent of man doth nothing thereunto; it hangeth nothing of time nor place, but according as right reason is ever one, so is this law, and never varieth after the fancy of man. This law is the ground and end of the other, to the which it must ever be referred, noe otherwise than the

conclusions of arts mathematical are ever referred to their principles. For civil ordinance is but as a mean to bring man to observe this law of nature, insomuch that if there be any civil law ordained which cannot be resolved thereto, it is of no value. For all good civil laws spring and issue out of the law of nature, as brooks and rivers out of fountains and wells; and to that all must be resolved and referred as to the end why they be ordained, to the observation whereof they are but as means.⁴²

At the outset of the dialogue, as we have seen, Starkey had Pole voicing the opinion that man was best in his natural state in a golden age. By the latter part of the dialogue, Pole has come fully to accept Lupset's position.

A time there was, Master Lupset, as we find in stories many and diverse, when man, without city or town, law of religion, wandered abroad in the wild fields and woods none other wise than you see now brute beasts to do.

No longer does Pole opine that man should live "in the wild forest, there more following the study of virtue, as it is said men did in the golden age. . . ."^{*} It was through the agency of reason that man advanced, and until such time he remained in this primitive state.

At the which time he was led and drawn without reason and rule by frail fantasy and inordinate affects, and so long con-

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See above page 20.

tinued and many years, till at the last certain men of great wit and policy, with perfit eloquence and high philosophy, considering the excellent nature and dignity of man, and perceiving right well that he was born and of nature brought forth to higher perfection than he applied himself unto, began to persuade the rest of the people to forsake that rudeness and uncomely life, and so to follow some order and civility.

Starkey, through Pole, then describes the rise of urban civilization in terms that bear a striking resemblance to those used by Vives.

And first of all to build them certain cities and towns wereto they might assemble to their common aid, succour and commodity, avoiding the danger and peril of the wild beasts, by whom they were oft before devoured and destroyed. Then, after they devised certain ordinance and laws whereby they might be somewhat induced to follow a life convenient to their nature and dignity.

What follows is among the strongest indications of the idea of progress in his work:

These laws and ordinance, at the first beginning, also were unperfit and somewhat rude, according to the time and nature of the people; for it was not possible suddenly by exact law and policy to bring such a rude multitude to perfit civility, but ever as the people by process of time in virtue increased, so particular laws by politic men were devised. And thus in long time, by perfit eloquence and high philosophy, men were brought by little and little from the rude life in fields and woods to this civility which you now see stablished and set in all well-ruled cities and towns.⁴³

While the idea of progress is yet 200 years in the future, one can certainly see here a bold step towards it and away from the idea of the Golden Age as something in the distant, mythological past, not something yet to be attained. Both Starkey and Vives saw their age as one not to be despised, but as one equal to those of antiquity. The concept that society undergoes slow gradual change to meet new circumstances was important to both, and both can be seen to allow that a progress of man from a primitive state of nature to yet a more advanced level of society was a positive development. It remained for Richard Hooker at the century's end to give final formulation to the idea of progress of the sixteenth-century, drawing upon the work of Vives and Starkey but also upon the tradition of the defense of the Via Media as worked out by the apologists of the established church between 1520 and 1580.

CHAPTER II

THE VIA MEDIA AND THE CONCEPT OF DEVELOPMENT

The Reformation was an intensely historicist period wherein the protagonists made extensive use of the past for polemical purposes. For the English Reformation this was particularly the case due to the peculiarities of reform in Britain. As is well known, her Reformation began haltingly in doctrinal matters though quite calamitously in regards to her relationship with Rome, and it was not until Edward VI's reign that Protestants could contest openly for their vision of the Church reformed. The manner in which events unfolded left England with a church government essentially unchanged (excepting the displacement of Pope by King and the dissolution of the monasteries, in themselves a sharp break with the past), but with a Protestant doctrine in a state of flux. Apologists for what would become the Established Church were forced by circumstance to defend the episcopate and the existing church government as legitimate developments, using as a guiding principle the adiaphoristic doctrine. Their sense of historical

change would become sharpened by the challenge posed from the more radically Protestant of Englishmen. It is among the advocates of the Via Media that we find expressions of the idea of progress.

As already noted, one of the ways in which the English Reformation differed from that on the Continent was that it was begun by the state and then taken further by the Reformers, and that it was enforced through law. English law was (and is) based on precedents and is thus to some extent historical. For the Reformation, though, precedents were hard to find, and justification of it was taken from history (as in the preface to the Act in Restraint of Appeals), or alternatively from political theory, itself drawn in part from historical appeals.¹ The Henrician reformation was successful in no small part because of its "appeal to history and the maintenance of the traditional faith and practice of Catholicism."² As time passed, the continuity with Catholicism (at least in its Roman form) became weaker, but in appealing to the first five centuries of the Church's history defenders of the Via Media were able to rebut the charge of innovation with a claim to be engaged in renovation, calling for support from the same authorities used by their Roman Catholic opponents.³ In establishing the royal supremacy there was of necessity change, but in defending it as legitimate its apolo-

gists made "an honest effort. . .to join the past and the living present."⁴ The church was recognized "as a corporation, human in origin and character, a society capable of change in its ideas and practices as its conditions of temporal existence changed, its experience susceptible of analysis in the shifting and relativistic terms of period and process."⁵

Yet for all the concern with history, one finds little that points to the idea of progress, much less gives expression to it, before John Whitgift. Not all Protestants shared the sense of positive growth and development in the Church's past, and it was not until John Jewel and John Whitgift that it became common. William Tyndale (c. 1495-1536) used history, but that his writing turned historical on occasion was purely coincidental, as he viewed history much the same way Luther did: useful when denouncing, but not a way of proving truths.⁶ He viewed the history of the Church after the Apostles as one of the decline of a once pristine institution, but since it was outside the scope of the New Testament he felt it could be subjected to historical scrutiny.⁷ But one never encounters much interest on his part with speculation on growth and development in the Church--not surprising, since his concern was the restoration of the Apostolic Church. To admit development would be to give ground to the Roman Catholics, particularly

his chief antagonist Thomas More. Tyndale was followed in the same way by Robert Barnes and John Bale, two other early Protestants who made use of history. Barnes (c. 1495-1540) intended in his work to demonstrate through a narrative of the growth of the Papacy's temporal power how the clergy were always subversive to royal government.⁸ His Vitae Romanorum pontificum (1536) was an attempt to show how numerous practices in the Roman Church could not be found in the Apostolic Church and were thus anachronistic. Whatever his intentions, he did not fulfill the promise that his work held. As has been pointed out, "the text was tendentious, the marginal notes vitriolic," and he did not go into great detail, for "Barnes did not intend to write a full history of the church." This, combined with his "totally uncritical use of sources" leaves "only one conclusion. . . possible: Barnes was simply no historian."⁹

John Bale (1495-1563) was certainly the better historian of the three,¹⁰ yet he too followed Tyndale's interpretation of the Church's past. In Bale's work was sounded the Protestant version of a decline from a golden age: "In the prymatyve churche was the gospel gredylve recyved of the unyversall worlde, in the myddes thereof whan Sathan was at lyberte, was yt in a maner conttempned of all menne, and hypocresye taken up in the stede thereof. Now in the latter ende are menne agayne verye desyrouse of yt. . . ."¹¹

In The Image of bothe churches (1545-6), Bale intended to demonstrate that the Church fell from its early purity, though God kept a faithful few true to him. In this regard, his approach had a marked similarity to that of Thomas More's. Bale used Revelation as his guide, following Francis Lambert's work on that book closely, supplying a wealth of detail lacking in the Marburg reformer's work.¹² Revelation, in Bale's work, if interpreted correctly in correlation with the history of the Church showed a decline, slow but increasing, until a reaction took place. Perfection existed only at the beginning.¹³

Yet while Bale never fully adopted a developmental position as regards the church's past, he did not remain a rigid biblicist. Sola Scriptura was a major principle in Bale's armory of weapons polemical for use against the Roman Church, especially when attacking the excrescences of late medieval piety, but against radicals carrying Sola Scriptura to an extreme, Bale had to extend the time frame of the pure church beyond the Apostolic period. Enter the use of periodization against the radicals, and his characterization of the English church to 597 as a golden era. By the publication of the Summararium (1548), he used the argument that no doctrine was valid except it be held "among doctors of the early Church."¹⁴ Bale had thus moved closer to the position of Cranmer,

Ridley and Jewel.

The last major historian-polemicist, John Foxe(1517-87), followed Bale. His Acts and Monuments (1563) was a history of two churches. On the one hand, he chronicled the false, or Roman, church in its sordid decline and contrasted it with the survival of the true church on the other hand. He used a periodization of church history, each section of which was about three hundred years. The first three hundred were those of purity and persecution; the second a period of quiet, ending with the rise of pope, monks, and the Infidel. The unmitigated decline went without serious challenge until Wyclif, but with him followed persecution once he uncovered the falsehoods of Rome. With Luther came the final blows that would hopefully topple the Papacy. In all, Foxe used the Apocalypse of St. John as his guide, and believed firmly in the divine planning of all history.¹⁵

Thus all four--Tyndale, Barnes, Bale and Foxe--while making heavy use of history in their polemics did not find a pattern of development and growth in the past. They repeated in religious form the Renaissance view of history as a decline from a golden past into decadence, with renewal only coming within their lifetime. For them, history was leading somewhere, and that somewhere was the Second Coming. In a later age this would be translated into a species of the idea

of progress,¹⁶ but for now it was in the work of the defenders of the Via Media that the ideas of progress were to be found.

The ecclesiastics charged with the defense of the established church found in the adiaphoristic principle one of their most useful weapons, first against their Roman Catholic opponents and later against the extreme Protestants. Simply put, adiaphora were things indifferent to salvation primarily, but also to church government. Moderate Protestants felt that if Scripture did not forbid something, then it was a matter of indifference. Such a principle left the way open for development both in church doctrine and government, which was just the point the Anglicans were trying to make. No one in the controversy intended that the English church be forced into the mold of the early Church in a procrustean manner. The difference arose from what was to constitute a thing indifferent.¹⁷

Adiaphorism among English reformers came from varied sources. For Thomas Starkey and later Richard Hooker, the legal tradition within Aristotelianism was the starting point, for Ridley and Whitgift, Augustine. Erasmian humanism and Henrician political necessity were significant factors.¹⁸ Whatever source, adiaphorism took its bearings from Scripture, as the Bishop's Book of 1537 maintained: "The greatest

part of these rules or canons consisteth only in. . . such things as be of themselves but mean and indifferent things (that is to say, neither commanded expressly in Scripture, nor necessary contained or implied therein, nor yet expressly repugnant or contrary thereunto."¹⁹ Starkey believed that Church ceremonies, the "rites, customs and traditions of fathers, having no ground but only by prescription of time" were open to change because scripture said nothing of them, leaving them "to world policy. . . as time and place requireth." Customs could well have been of good use at one time and then have decayed to the point of necessary abolition. They were valid if not positively forbidden in Scripture and were of good use.²⁰ Adiaphorism for Starkey was thus based on the distinction between the immutable natural or divine law and the mutability and changeability of human institutions and law.²¹

The concept of adiaphora and the notions concerning the primitive church were both important contributions to the historical slant of the English Reformation, and were also important to the development of the idea of progress. Adiaphora included ceremonies, institutions, polity, all of which were open to historical investigation and which could be

viewed within the context of their origin. In investigating the origin of adiaphora, the history of the primitive church was necessarily involved, and thus the two were intimately related in Anglican apologetics.²² The principle was useful to defenders of the Via Media, as noted above, who wanted to be part of the universal Catholic Church, yet had to stress the historical diversity within Christendom in the interest of their English church.²³ In his controversy with the Roman Catholic opponents of the English church, John Jewel (1522-71) built on the foundation of patristic scholarship laid by Thomas Cranmer while emphasizing more clearly the distinction between those institutions that were human in origin and thus subject to historical investigation, and matters of faith, which were beyond scrutiny.²⁴ Jewel acknowledged that though Scripture is the basis of truth, not all truth was contained within it, only the essentials of salvation. Thus "the way is left open for the development of those things not essential for salvation."²⁵ Jewel wrote

At the last, ye conclude, that it were an errour to say, we are bounde of necessity to followe the use of the Primitive church.

To make you a full and cleare answeere hereunto, I must nedes use this distinction, There were sum orders in the Primitive church commaunded by God, and sum other were devised by men, for the better trayning of the people, Such orders as were commaunded by God, may not be changed in any

case, only because God commaunded them.
For as God is everlasting so is his worde
and commaundement everlasting.

The similarity to arguments for the inviolability
of natural law is obvious; the terms are different,
but the approach is the same.

After setting forth what is immutable in church
law, Jewel turns to that which can be altered if
necessary.

Of the other syde, sutche orders as have
been devysed by men may be broken, upon
sum consideration, onely because they
were men that devysed them. For as men
themselves be mortall, so all theyr
wisdomes and inventiones be but mortall.
As that the communion should be used in
the mornynge, or at nyght. That women should
come to the church either covered or open
faced, wherin ye say S. Peter toke order.
That the ministers goods shoulde be all
in common, or otherwyse, & c. These and
other lyke were thynges appointed and or-
dered by men, and therefore were never used
in all places of one sorte. But as they
were brought in by men, so myghte they be
dissolved and broken by men. In these
thynges, I graunte, the exaumples of the
doctoores, or Apostles, bynde us not.
In these thynges it were an erreure to
say we are bound of necessitie to follow
the use of the Primitive church. . . .²⁶

Jewel was the last of the major apologists to
combat the Roman Catholics over the Via Media. By
the 1570's a new opponent arose to challenge the
established church, the Puritan party. The Puritans
took much the same attitude towards the past that

Tyndale, Barnes, Bale and Foxe took, and were bent on a restitution of the primitive church, purging it of all "popish" characteristics. The chief Anglican apologist of this period prior to Richard Hooker, John Whitgift, was less able to rely on historical arguments than was Jewel because he had to meet the Puritans on biblical grounds.²⁷ Whitgift's approach continued in the use of the adiaphoristic principle, distinguishing between the visible or external government of the Church and the invisible or spiritual. The former he held to consist of things indifferent.²⁸ Whitgift, in contrast to his opponents, saw flux in the early Church and subsequent adaptation to changing circumstances as time passed.²⁹ He allowed that Church government, as a human institution, is open to change and development.

That any one kind of government is so necessary that without it the church cannot be saved, or that it may not be altered into some other kind thought to be more expedient, I utterly deny. . . . I find no one certain and perfect government prescribed or commanded in the scriptures to the church of Christ; which no doubt should have been done, if it had been a matter necessary unto the salvation of the church . . . Some kind of government may be a part of the church, touching the outward form and perfection of it, yet it is not such a part of the essence and being, but that it may be the Church of Christ without this or that kind of government; and therefore the kind of government of the church is not 'necessary unto salvation'. . . .³⁰

Whitgift saw development not only in church government, but even in Scripture. He felt that there was a progression from the Old to New Testament, with the New transcending the Old.³¹ In his Defence of the Answer (1574), he maintained that "there is no one certain kind of government in the church which must of necessity be perpetually observed."³² Whitgift thought it would be with "preposterous zeal" were the Church to slavishly imitate the Apostles because time, circumstance and place were all different and thus there was a possibility that change and development would occur.³³

That change and development were likely to occur and were variable according to place, circumstance and time is an idea that recurs throughout Whitgift's work. It is not unrestricted, though, for he lodges in the Church authority to direct the change that will come: "Scripture hath left many things to the discretion of the church. . . ." ³⁴ His primary concern was to demonstrate that Scripture allowed for such offices as had developed since the Apostolic age to exist, but Whitgift also paused to reflect on the mutability of laws of a more general character. There were, in his view (and in this he reflected the possible influence of Thomas Starkey), various gradations of laws.

Some general, and given to all; other personal, and pertain only to one singular person, or

to one nation and kind of people. . .some which are perpetual, and not to be omitted or altered; other which are temporal, and may be omitted or altered, as the circumstance of time, place, and persons doth require.³⁵

To those who would maintain that mutability does not extend to laws governing Church institutions, Whitgift responded:

But I say that in the whole Scripture there is no commandment that it should so be nor any example that maketh therein any necessary or general rule but that it may be altered as time and occasion serveth. . . .³⁶

"[M]ay be altered as time and occasion serveth. . . ."; "may be omitted or altered, as the circumstance of time, place, and persons doth require"--these are lines of a refrain that is sounded throughout his work. Whitgift does not envision that this alteration is inevitable, but neither does he hold that all change since the Apostles is but decay, as early English Protestants and zealous Puritans believed. Whitgift clearly believes that there is room for positive, constructive change.

It was with the matter of church government, as noted above, that Whitgift was most concerned, and it is there that the idea of progress is most evident. He lashed out constantly against what he perceived as a slavish adherence to Scripture:

That no ceremony, order, discipline, or kind of government may be in the church except the same be expressed in the Word of God is a great absurdity and breedeth many inconveniences.³⁷

Whitgift does not go so far as to denigrate the importance of Scripture as a guide, nor does he maintain that anything in contravention of Scripture is legitimate, an error he would with the Puritans accuse Rome of committing. But he does believe that which is not in conflict with Scripture is at the Church's discretion to maintain or change.

We are also well assured that Christ in his Word hath fully and plainly comprehended all things requisite to faith and good life; but yet hath he committed certain orders of ceremonies and kind of government to the disposition of his church, the general rules given in his Word being observed and nothing being done contrary to his will and commandment therein contained. . . .³⁸

An aspect of Church government Whitgift believes subject to alteration is that of offices. As all offices "are not necessary for all times of the church," so others "may be brought in meet for the government of the same."³⁹ Such things as titles were matters of indifference to Scripture, Whitgift maintained, as in the case of archbishop.

The authority and the thing whereof the archbishop hath his name was in Paul's time, and therefore the name was lawful; and if it had not been in St. Paul's time, yet were both the name and the office lawful because it pertaineth to the external policy and regiment of the church, which is variable according to the place, time, person, and other circumstances.⁴⁰

Whitgift resorted to exegesis at times in an effort to challenge that of his Puritan foes:

I pray you what meant St. Paul in I Cor. xiv, after he had prescribed certain orders unto them to be observed in the church, thus generally to conclude. . . 'Let all things be done decently and in order'? Doth he not there give unto them authority to make orders in the church so that all things be done in order and decently? The best interpreters do understand this as a general rule given unto the church to examine her traditions and constitutions by; and therefore without all doubt their judgment is that the church hath authority in external things to make orders and appoint laws, not expressed in the Word of God, so that this rule of the apostle be observed.⁴¹

Whitgift insisted that there be room for growth and development in church government, and that his position had the warrant of the Apostles and of Christ.

As for names and titles and other external things variable according to divers circumstances, he [Christ] hath left them to the liberty of his church. . . which is one part of his singular goodness towards the church in that it is not so servilely tied to external things and to the letter as it was under the law.⁴²

It is clear from his work that Whitgift was a proponent of the importance of change in church government. He believed that church institutions were subject to place and time, and could be changed to meet changing circumstances, and in fact should be. These concepts are integral to the development of the idea of progress, and it is clear from what has been shown above that Whitgift was not uncongenial to that idea as it had developed up to his time. Yet he went only a small way down the path that led to the growth of the idea of progress. While he held institutions were open to change, he did not believe doctrine changed, and he certainly did not believe human nature was subject to improvement this side of the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. In this regard he was somewhat at odds with Vives and Starkey, as well as Erasmus. It was left to Richard Hooker to draw on the thought of both groups and unite them into the strongest expression of the idea of progress in the sixteenth-century.

CHAPTER III

RICHARD HOOKER AND THE IDEA OF PROGRESS

Richard Hooker, the "judicious" Hooker, was one of the most esteemed of ecclesiastics produced by the established church in the England of Elizabeth. He was in many ways the finest apologist for the Via Media and was almost certainly the most philosophical, a fact evident to anyone with even a passing familiarity of his Of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Polity. His work is the summation of fifty years of labor by his predecessors, a systematization of what had until then been a disparate collection of arguments some fruitful and some leading to blind alleys. It is in Hooker, therefore, that we find the fullest expression of the idea of progress as it had unfolded in the sixteenth century. Hooker, in drawing together his defense of the established church, implicitly developed the idea of progress to its greatest extent prior to the mid-seventeenth century. In doing so, he drew on the work of humanists like Vives and Starkey, and the historical insights of his mentors Jewel and Whitgift.

Hooker displayed his humanist temperament in his optimistic view of man's perfectibility, at least man's potential for perfection. He believed that "everything naturally and necessarily doth desire the utmost good and greatest perfection, whereof nature hath made it capable, even so man." This being the case, humans "cannot choose but wish and covet it."¹ Hooker believed that a gradual perfection was in the nature of things: "All. . .things besides are somewhat in possibilitie, which as yet they are not in act." He continues: "And for this cause there is in all things an appetite or desire, whereby they inclyne to something which they may be: and when they are it, they shall be perfecter then nowe they are."² This progress to perfection he divides into degrees, the first being "that generall perfection which all thinges doe seeke, in desiring the continuance of their being." The second degree "is that which each thing coveteth by affecting resemblaunce with God, in the constancie and excellencie of those operations which belong to their kinde." Hooker saw God as the end of all human progression towards perfection, and quotes Aristotle to the effect that "'the workes of nature do alwayes ayme at that which cannot be bettered.'"³

The means by which man grows in perfection Hooker believed to be knowledge, and here again he shows his humanist background. "With Plato what one

thing more usuall, then to excite men unto the love of wisdom, by showing how much wise men are thereby exalted above men; how knowledge doth rayse them up into heaven; how it maketh them, though not Gods, yet as gods, high, admirable and divine?"⁴ In his argument for the possibility of purposeful change, Hooker advanced a theory of the progressive development of human knowledge and thus the perfectibility of man, one of the cardinal features of the modern idea of progress. He looked to reason as a supplement to divine revelation; it was for the purpose of discovering law, among other things, that God gave man reason.⁵

Hooker believed all beings to have a tendency to pursue the good, yet the "soule of man therefore being capable of a more divine perfection, hath (besides the faculties of growing unto sensible knowledge which is common unto us with beasts) a further habilitie, whereof in them there is no show at all, the abilitie of reaching higher then unto sensible things."⁶ It is a long, slow process by which men rise upward in knowledge, for "men if wee view them in their spring, are at first without understanding or knowledge at all." Knowledge comes by degrees, and in time men will "come at length to be even as the Angels themselves." Hooker argued, much as John Locke would later, that "the soule of man" is "at the first as a

booke, wherein nothing is, and yet all thinges may be imprinted;" it is our duty "to search by what steppes and degrees it ryseth unto the perfection of knowledge."⁷

For a time, men ascertain nothing, and until "we grow to some ripeness of years," the progress in man's knowledge is not apparent. During that time the "soule of man doth only store it selfe with the conceipts of things of inferiour and more open qualitie" and it is these that later "serve as instruments unto that which is greater." Until such time, men rise not above the level of animals. However, "once it comprehendeth anything above this, as the differences of time, affirmations, negations, and contradictions in speech; we then count it to have some use of natural reason."⁸ The importance of reason in Hooker's Lawes cannot be overstated, especially in regard to his notion of progress. It is reason which, as will be pointed out below, enables man to discern good laws from bad and to improve his state in the world through better laws; it is also through reason that man devised the mechanical arts that enabled him to make his physical existence a little better. But it must again be acknowledged that Hooker believed man to use his reason to advance or progress in the world only within the bounds laid down by God's divine immutable law. In this respect Hooker

differs from the modern proponents of progress, for they have by and large banished God from His creation and from any role in man's progress in the world. Hooker did not, however, perceive God as intervening in His creation, and is not as "primitive" as the moderns might think.

Hooker acknowledged the strong possibility that the progress he identified in man's development, in his ascent from his primitive beginnings, will continue into the future: "Whereunto if afterwarde there might be added the right helpes of true art and learning (which helps I must plainely confesse this age of the world, carrying the name of a learned age, doth neyther much know nor greatly regard) there would undoubtedly be almost as great difference in maturitie of judgement betweene men therewith inured, and that which now men are, as betweene men that are now and innocents."⁹ The parallel between this sentiment and that expressed by Vives is striking,^{*} and Hooker's barb cast at his own time does not obscure the fact that he saw room for unlimited growth in knowledge. For those who doubt, he responds in advance:

Which speech if any condemne as being over hyperbolicall, let them consider but this one thing. No art is at the first finding out so perfect as industrie may after make it. Yet the very first man that to any purpose knew the way we speake of and fol-

^{*}See above, p. 15.

lowed it, hath alone thereby performed more very neede in all partes of naturall knowledge, then sithence in any one part thereof, the whole world besides hath doone.¹⁰

Admittedly there is not here an unqualified, unequivocal statement that progress will continue inexorably into the future. Man must after all work toward that end and he must exert effort to achieve the goal towards which he strives. Above all, Hooker maintains that "whatsoever we have hitherto taught, or shall hereafter, concerning the force of mans naturall understanding, this we always desire withall to be understood, that there is no kind of faculty or power in man or any other creature, which can rightly performe the functions allotted to it, without perpetuall aid and concurrence of that supreme cause of all things."¹¹ Hooker never left any doubt that throughout history, the Hand of God "disposed of what man proposed,"¹²

Man's drive to higher things found its most immediate manifestation in the origins of society. Hooker firmly believed that government was a necessary and positive development that came as a result of the Fall. In the strife and conflict that resulted after that calamitous event, men reasoned that "by growing unto composition and agreement amongst themselves, by ordeining some kind of government publike, and by yeelding themselves subject" to leaders "unto whom they graunted authoritie to rule and governe," they

might be able to secure "the peace, tranquillitie, and happy estate" necessary for a civilized society.¹³

It was not only for civil order that Hooker thought men developed forms of society, but also for survival, "for as much as we are not by our selves sufficient to furnish ourselves with competent store of things needfull for such a life as our nature doth desire, a life fit for the dignitie of man: therefore to supply those defects and imperfections, which are in us living, single, and solie by our selves, we are naturally induced to seeke communion and fellowship with others. This was the cause of mens uniting themselves at the first in politique societies. . . ."14

After having secured life and the means whereby to support it, Hooker theorized that men then turned to the development of religion. "True it is," he wrote, "that the kingdome of God must be the first thing in our purposes and desires." Nevertheless, "in as much as righteous life presupposeth life, in as much as to live virtuously it is impossible except we live, therefore the first impediment, which naturally we endeavor to remove, is penurie and want of things without which we cannot live." This led men to discover and develop "sundry artes mechanical" in "the verie prime of the world," thus supplying the "many implements. . .necessarie" for "such a life as hath in it joy, comfort, delight and pleasure."¹⁵

In this manner, Hooker traced the development of the necessary elements of human society, illustrating the progression of man from his primitive state to a more civilized state, and setting the stage for the next development in his argument. Once society had developed, Hooker thought it folly to return to some mythical golden age of man in his pure and natural state, because that which is natural is not perfect. Since man is, as a result of the Fall, not naturally good, it would be absurd to return to a state of nature and renounce all development of society.¹⁶

"We all make complaint of the iniquitie of our times" he wrote; "for the days are evill." Yet he called upon the men of his time to observe their own days and "compare them with those times, wherein there were no civill societies, with those times wherein there was as yet no maner of publique regiment established," former barbarous and lawless times; "and we have surely good cause to thinke that God hath blessed us exceedingly, and Hath made us behold most happie daies."¹⁷ Hooker did not stop there, satisfied that contemporary society was good enough and should remain static; with Aristotle he perceived that man, being a creative agent, would express this nature in his civilization. Thus, as civilization changed, so would the form of government change to accommodate new developments.¹⁸

Hooker argued that all things human were open to change; "God never ordeyned any thing that could be bettered." Nevertheless, "many things He hath that have been chaunged, and that for the better." And when changed, that "which succeedeth as better now when change is requisite, had bene worse when that which now is chaunged was instituted." If this were not so, then God would leave no room for choice unless there were "some new growne occasion making that which hath bene better worse;" in such a situation "men doe not presume to chaunge Gods ordinance, but they yeelde thereunto requiring it selfe to be chaunged."¹⁹ In the universe described by Hooker in his Lawes there is room for growth, improvement and change.

While Hooker's sense of history led him to find the roots of everything in the historic past, he "looked forward also to developments that might still take place."²⁰ This possibility of purposeful, progressive change directed by man found clear expression in Hooker's discussion of laws and in man's ability to develop them. Not all law was subject to change. A distinction was drawn between natural and positive law; the former is identified with God's law, which "is eternall, and therefore can have no shew or cullor of mutabilitie."²¹ Positive law, however, is subject to alteration: "Positive lawes are either permanent or else changeable, according as the matter it selfe

is concerning which they were first made."²² Hooker argued that the "wisdome which is learned by tract of time, findeth the lawes that have bene in former ages establisht, needfull in later to be abrogated," for in truth, "that which sometime is expedient doth not alwaies so continue."²³ The necessity that men of past ages have found which requires them to alter laws in response to changing circumstances was a major theme in Hooker's argument for the mutability of human law. Human laws legislated in past ages always become outdated because they do "not allow continuous application to new situations."²⁴ He allowed that at "first when some certaine kinde of regiment was once approved," those framing the laws saw no use of their being changed at the time. It was not until "by experience they found this for all parts verie inconvenient," and thus realized "to live by one man's will became the cause of all men's misery."²⁵ He thus argued that men should not be bound to follow the laws of previous ages if they are found to be burdensome.

Hooker did not argue for one moment that each new age should rewrite all the laws of former times, but he consistently emphasizes their necessary mutability. If laws are not to be abolished, they nevertheless are often in need of adjustment: "The end wherefore lawes were made may bee permanent," but "those lawes neverthelesse require some alteration,

if there bee any unfitness in the meanes which they prescribe as tending unto that end and purpose."

This is so because some things that necessitate certain laws are unfortunately always with us. For example, "a law that to bridle theft doth punish theves with a quadruple restitution hath an end which wil continue as long as the world it self contineuth," for "theft will alwaies and will alwaies neede to be bridled." But "no man can warrant" that such a law will always be sufficient, for "that which hath bene once most sufficient, may wax otherwise by alteration of time and place, that punishment which hath bene sometimes forcible to bridle sinne may growe afterwarde too weake and feeble."²⁶ Hooker did admit that some laws are not of the type that are in need of continual adjustment; "If therefore the end for which a lawe provideth be perpetually necessary, and the way whereby it provideth be perpetually necessary, and the way whereby it provideth perpetually also most apt, no doubt but that every such lawe ought for ever to remaine unchangeable."²⁷ He concluded that any change undertaken should be done with the utmost care, and not be arbitrary, "for arbitrarie alterations, when lawes in them selves not simply bad or unmeete are changed for better and more expedient; if the benefit of that which is newly better devised bee but small, sith the custome of easiness to alter and change is

so evill, no doubt but to beare a tollerable soare is better then to venter on a daungerous remedie."²⁸

Hooker consistently allowed for the possibility of progressive change in human law, a progress which should necessarily take place over an extended period of time; it should be the slow, considered adjustment of human laws to meet the changing needs of society. Hooker conceived of all laws in terms of historical convenience and development. The aim of Hooker's system of laws was to "determine the comparative independence, with regard to the fundamental principles of Christianity, of human legislation, and to show that it is by its nature subject to change and capable of progressive transformation."²⁹

As we have seen, the idea of progress can be discerned in an embryonic form in Hooker's discussions of man's perfectibility and of the mutability and progressive change in laws of society. Yet this notion of progress was not confined strictly to civil law; Hooker after all wrote on ecclesiastical polity, and in fact he shows that matters of church law are subject to progressive improvement.

Hooker believed that matters of polity were subject to change, and he posited that the authority to direct such change as may be needed lay with the church: "The Church hath authoritie to establish that for an order at one tyme, which at an other time it maie abolish, and in both doe well." Such

change was confined strictly to polity, though: "Lawes touchinge matter of order are changeable, by the power of the Church; articles concerninge doctrine not so."³⁰ One of the chief reasons for the necessity of change was the incompleteness, in matters of polity, of the works of the Apostles.

Is it necessary that all the orders of the Church which were then in use should be contained in their books? Surely no. For if the tenor of their writings be well observed, it shall unto any man easily appeare, that no more of them are there touched, then were needfull to be spoken of sometimes by one occasion, and sometimes by another.³¹

The idea that laws are subject to adjustment as circumstances change is important to Hooker, as it was to Whitgift.

Hooker attacks the notion put forward by his opponents that the rites and ceremonies of the early church were perfect, and those of his day, as they believed, having "in many thinges. . . departed from the auncient simplicities of Christ and his Apostles," were therefore imperfect. Granting that "the first state of thinges was best, that in the prime of Christian Religion faith was soundest, the scriptures of God were then best understood by all men" it follows "that customes lawes and ordinances devised since are not so good for the Church of Christ, but the best

way is to cut of later inventions, and to reduce things unto the auncient state wherin at the first they were." In the face of such an argument, Hooker begged to differ: "Which rule or canon we hold to be either uncertaine or at least wise insufficient; if not both."³² He asks "what reason is there in these thinges to urge the state of one onely age, as a patterne for all to follow?" The arguments of his opponents he reduces to the absurd; must Christians "assemble. . .to serve God in close and secret meetings" or must "common brookes and rivers. . .be used for places of baptisme" because this was the practice of the early church? Hooker readily admits that the "faith zeale and godlines of former times is worthylie had in high honour." Yet this should not bind future generations to strictly practice their religion within the narrow confines of the early church.³³

Hooker accorded a high position to scripture, writing that "all those writings which conteine in them the lawe of God, all those venerable bookes of scripture, all those sacred tomes and volumes of holie writ, they are with such absolute perfection framed, that in them there neither wanteth any thing, the lacke whereof might deprive us of life; nor any thing in such aboundeth, that as being superfluous, unfruitfull, and altogether needlesse, wee should

thinke it no losse or daunger at all if we did not want it."³⁴ Yet for all that, he believed that there was room for doctrinal development of concepts found within scripture. He distinguishes between the notion that a doctrine or institution must be contained within scripture and the idea that it need only be comprehended within scripture; the latter concept, which he favored, allows for growth of development based on the original text. "Against the former of these two constructions, instance hath sundrie wayes bene geven" as in the case of "our believe in the Trinitie, the Coeternitie of the Sonne of God with his Father, the proceeding of the Spirit from the Father and the Sonne, the dutie of baptizing infants, these with such other principall points, the necessitie wherof is by none denied, are notwithstanding in scripture no where to be found by expresse literall mention, only deduced they are out of scripture by collection." Hooker questions how long this process of deducing principles from scripture, this process of progressive development of doctrine will continue, and concludes that we must "not thinke that as long as the world doth indure, the wit of man shal be able to sound the bottome of that which may be concluded out of the scripture, especially if things conteined by collection do so far extend, as to draw in whatsoever may be at any time out of scripture but probablie and conjeccural-

lie surmised."³⁵

It is, however, primarily in the matter of church laws and institutions that Hooker gives evidence of the idea of progress. Scripture contains several of the most important and basic laws pertaining to the church, a point that is readily conceded. There are, though, "a number of things. . .for which the scripture hath not provided by any law, but left them unto the carefull discretion of the Church; we are to search how the Church in these cases may be well directed to make that provision by lawes which is most convenient and fit." How this is to be done "partly scripture and partly reason must teach to discerne."³⁶ There are some things to which the "Church is bound till the worldes ende." The question then "is onely how farre the bounds of the Churches libertie do reach." Hooker believed "that the power which the Church hath lawfully to make lawes and orders for it selfe, doth extende unto sundrie thinges of ecclesiasticall jurisdiction and other such matters."³⁷

Among the laws susceptible to change Hooker included "onely such lawes as are positive, and doe make that now good or evill by being commanded or forbidden, which otherwise of it selfe were not simply the one or the other." If there is no indication of how long such laws are to continue in force (as might be supposed in the case of certain ceremonial laws in the Old

Testament which were in force until Christ fulfilled them), "then have we no light to direct our judgmentes concerning the chaungeableness or immutabilitie of them, but by considering the nature and qualitie of such lawes." Hooker believed it the "nature of everie lawe" to be "judged of by the ende for which it was made, and by the aptnes of thinges therein prescribed unto the same end."³⁸ He maintained that "lawes though both ordeyned of God himselfe, and the end for which they were ordeined continuing, may notwithstanding cease, if by alteration of persons or times they be found insufficient to attain unto that end." The question then becomes in "which respect why may we not presume that God doth even call for such change or alteration, as the very condition of thinges them selves doth make necessary?"³⁹

Hooker continually emphasizes that he is not advocating the alteration of doctrine (although as we have seen above he did believe there to be room for progressive development, an unfolding of Revelation), and quotes Tertullian: "The rule of faith, saith Tertullian, is but one and that alone immoveable, and impossible to be framed or cast anew." He insists, though, that with the "lawe of outwarde order and politie" it is not so. "There is no reason in the world wherefore we should esteeme it as necessarie alwaies to doe, as alwaies to believe the same things;

seing every man knoweth that the matter of faith is constant, the matter contrariwise of action daily changeable, especially the matter of action belonging unto Church politie." He repeats that "articles of believe, and thinges which all men must of necessitie doe to the end they may be saved, are eyther set downe in scripture, or els plainely therby to be gathered." But for the governance of the church laws can be made "which kinde of lawes (for as much as they are not in them selves necessary to salvation) may after they are made be also changed as the difference of times or places shall require."⁴⁰ He consistently maintains throughout his work "thet nether Gods being author of laws for government of his Church, nor his committing them unto scripture, is any reason sufficient wherefore all Churches shoulde for ever be bounde to keep them without chaunge."⁴¹

In all, Hooker shows himself the heir of John Whitgift and beyond him Thomas Starkey in matters of church polity, and of Starkey and Juan Vives in regards to his discussion of society and the perfectibility of man. At no point did he come forth with an explicit statement of the idea of progress. Yet as we have seen, much of his argument in the Of the Lawes of Ecclesiasticall Polity involved an implicit assumption of human progress. Hooker saw in the creation of better institutions, as well as better laws, the

steady growth of society. He did not believe that a society should remain static, and he consistently urged the idea that human institutions were open to change and improvement; only Divine Law was above alteration. His Lawes established Hooker not only as the outstanding apologist for the Via Media in the sixteenth century, but also as one of the greatest of Elizabethan philosophers. He stood on the threshold of the modern world, and his development of an idea of progress could well be thought to place him beyond "the watershed that separates medieval from modern."⁴²

EPILOGUE

Hooker was, in the matter of the idea of progress, the heir and finisher of a stream of thought that can be found in Vives and Starkey on the one hand, and in Whitgift on the other. To what extent he was influenced by continental thought is open to conjecture, but the issue of Hooker's relationship to sixteenth century historical thought, in particular to how historians of that time viewed history as unfolding, cannot be overlooked.

The sixteenth century was, after all, the age in which the modern historical consciousness was born.¹ There were basically two schools of historical thought, the Italian and the French. Renaissance humanists in Italy wrought a "reorientation in thought"--they were more concerned with "gaining access to the past" than with "how to make use of it." No longer could they avoid the fact of historical change.² They revived an interest in historians like Livy, Cicero, and Polybius, and they dealt with the past in realistic terms, with attention given to the particular and individual, and not in abstractions. They also contributed to historical thought an antiquarian interest and veneration for antiquity. For all this, they remained in the thrall

of the ancient historians, whom they imitated and believed could not be bettered.³

The Italians looked upon history as political history, largely of contemporary subjects, which was used to instruct by example, but they drew from their study no idea of progression in the human past. For them, change was explained by the periodization "golden age--dark age--renaissance," in which history had no goal.⁴ With the invasions of Italy that began in 1494, Italian historians moved away from the writing of civic histories extolling the virtues of a given city and began to address issues of causation. In Florence in particular there arose an approach concerned with the analysis of government and the fate of states, especially in the work of Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527) and Francesco Guicciardini (1483-1540). Both sought to explain history in terms of laws that controlled the change in human affairs. Machiavelli saw history as an interplay between the action of humans and human subjection to uncontrollable forces, or necessita. In both Machiavelli and Guicciardini Fate or Fortune was the ultimate moving force in history.⁵ There is thus no progress in history, only cycles in which governments go from principality to tyranny to democracy to anarchy and back to the rule of princes.⁶

The French school of historiography was, in respect of the idea of progress, much more fruitful.⁷ Their approach developed out of an interest in the

development of legal institutions unlike the Italians and their concern with politics.⁸ In fact, they developed a secularized version of universal history, and included the whole course of the human past within their broad sweep.⁹ It is in the work of Jean Bodin (c. 1530-96) that this school of historical thought finds its ablest and most forceful exponent. In his Method of Understanding History (1566) Bodin outlines his theory of how history unfolded. He attacks the notion of a golden age in man's past from which all subsequent history is a tale of decline, scoffing that it was the illusion "of men carried out of port into the open sea--they think the houses and towns are department from them; thus they think that delight, gentle conduct, and justice have flown to the heavens and deserted the earth."¹⁰ Like Vives before him he gives honor to the ancients for their accomplishments, but feels "they left incomplete many of those things which have been completed and handed down to posterity by men of our own time. . . ."

Bodin cites the magnet and navigation (and the consequent discovery of the new world), geography, medicine, all developed by men of his age, and above all printing, which "alone can easily vie with all the discoveries of the ancients," as proof that there had been progress in human history.¹¹

Hooker must certainly have imbibed the thought of his age, and these currents sketched above were likely

taken in by his searching intellect. In so far as he viewed the church as an historical institution that has developed and grown through time he showed his historical sense. Yet in so far as he shows any direct influence of historical thinking it is the influence of Whitgift and the Via Media approach, not continental thought, that is strongest. The Italian idea of history as an endless succession of cycles found no place in his schema, and as a Christian he would reject the notion of fate as the controlling force in history.¹² His relationship to the French legal school of historical thought would seem much stronger, though he makes no explicit reference to it; certainly he must have been aware of the work of Bodin. For Hooker, the idea of progress as he gave expression to it, was an interpretation in abstract terms of how history unfolded, but it ironically arose not out of history per se, but out of a theory of man and of human institutions.

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