

THE  
PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW.

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THE PROBLEM OF PROGRESS.<sup>1</sup>

I.

THE mathematical training which was the distinguishing feature of my early school days compelled me, at a tender age, to wrestle with a variety of ingenious problems dealing with the lower forms of life. Among these problems was one which caught my childish fancy and challenged alike my imagination and my sympathy. A frog at the bottom of a deep, dark well made strenuous efforts each day to climb out, but each night fell back a certain distance. How long would it be before he could complete the difficult ascent, and begin a journey in the larger and brighter world above him? Sometimes, however, the problem was set in terms that made escape forever impossible, and I saw the wretched creature condemned to perpetual struggle and to a no less perpetual failure. His enjoyment of the world I found so fascinating must be at best by distant glimpses, mere hints or adumbrations, from the highest point reached in the side of the well. Given these conditions, was it not, I argued, a foolish illusion that inspired the hope of advance? Would it not be wiser for the frog to resign himself to the situation? Did he not by his futile struggles lose the possible satisfactions of the well? Or, on the other hand, might it be that he found his good in the very activity itself, without the vision or hope of any definite goal?

<sup>1</sup> Read as the address of the President of the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association, before a joint meeting of the Eastern and Western Divisions in New York City, December 28, 1922.