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DEMOCRACY-- FALSE OR TRUE?

A Prologue and Dream

BY

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DEMOCRACY

§ 1

It is a dangerous, but agreeable, game to play the prophet, perhaps

unwise; but while admitting that, I am going to do so, not because I feel sure, but because I want to sift my own thoughts. I may be told "why not do so in private?" I've done that already. Probably it does not matter what an old man says, "He is a weather beaten block waiting for axe or fire." Whatever Ideals are mine, there are few which are in agreement with the fashion of to-day. Still I am capable of looking forward. I've looked back a great deal in my life, and been a humble student of "Cause and Effect." Young enough to believe, even though it lies distant from hence, in Utopia, and I make bold to say so. I still believe in the human race. I still believe in a capacity for repentance and change of direction from bad to a better state of things. It is likely that the desirable, according to my philosophy, would be the undesirable to many, perhaps, just now, most people! Nevertheless I mean to state it.

William Morris made a delightful story, "News from Nowhere"; he thought that Socialism would realise his Ideal, perhaps it might; anyway Socialism is a pleasanter word than Individualism, it suggests "_Thou_," the other cries "_I_." _Thou_ has not been in the air of late. _I_ has been so, and prominently; of this, more presently!

Some great and wise men have spent considerable energies in building Utopia. Jesus Christ, Moses, Hamurrabbi, and Mohammed, Plato, Sir Thomas More, and, when I come to think of it, all leaders of thought have played with the bricks of that entertaining place. I imagine that the folk, who think at all, form a picture of their preference, which includes the future with the present. Seemingly, the future has a habit of taking care of itself; that is possibly a fatalistic fallacy! What _will_ be done in the future is in the making of the present. The flower is forming out of sight. We have no reason for

knowing what kind of being the man of the future, even of the near future, is to be. One thing, however, is pretty certain; he will be as good or evil, ignorant or learned, as he chooses. We might reason together for a year as to the meaning of _Good_ and _Evil_. To clear the way I will state now that I am a firm believer in Free Will, in as far as conduct is concerned. We have to die; that is a physical law as that we live is; but we can retard even the supreme victor, death, by effort of Will. To wish ardently is half way to obtaining.

If we wish wickedly we are on the road to wickedness. For those who thus wish I have no words but these, “It is a bad habit, reverse it.” The foundation of good is to wish _Well_ and nobly, and Will strongly by action. Belief in Free Will is an incentive to industry, courage and stability. It includes _Hope_, the sister of Faith and Charity and courage to proceed through the thorny way of Life; Industry to make life happy; and Stability to maintain effort however adverse circumstances may be to it, and Hope to make us cling to the dream and to realise it in Vision if not yet in fact, which urged us at the outset. Did “Free Will,” in the abstract, exist before we came hither and will it continue after we go hence? I suggest that Free Will is eternal, that God is All Free Will; when He breathed His spirit into man’s body He imparted it to him. Plato’s sublime allegory of the soul driving her chariot, directing her horses antagonistic Eros and Himeros, proclaims the potentiality and immortality of the Soul. If matter does not die but is converted into other matter, can the Soul, created before matter, die? What the conversion of matter and Soul is, is beyond our thinking. But what does concern us is how we use the soul during its pilgrimage within the body! Its temporary home must be split up to effect an escape for the eternal organism. Perhaps death

is really Life! Is it reasonable to believe that a live thing contains a dead one? If it is not so the soul was alive before it was environed by matter, and continues to live after its temporary shell is broken up and its particles are driven by Time hither and thither in dust.

The brain is matter, it is as wax, impressionable. From the first instant of its creation to its last effort it is receiving impressions. It dies as all matter dies. But do the impressions die? Instinct and reason say Nay. As far as they have exercised authority for good or evil upon the individual they do so reflectively upon a generation and progressively to succeeding generations. Philosophy tells us there is no waste in nature. If there is none as regards matter, is there likely to be as regards the soul which has been pre-existing and will be post-existing? If that is so and Free Will accepts and acts, brain impressions are immortal! Did the soul enter the body unasked? Does it leave unasked? A child under reprimand said, pathetically "I did not ask to be born," that child was obviously alluding to her inclination. The child inadvertently spoke as a fatalist; it was a way of saying "I could not help what I did." Before the soul enters the body is it an individual or only an atmosphere? Had it experience or not? Where has it been before? Has the soul a memory? These questions we all know have received answers from metaphysical and philosophic minds.

From the dawn of man's intelligence, whenever that was, until to-day, mankind has yearned for an answer. A great philosopher and friend of mine, the Bishop of Durham, Dr. Westcott, said to me "Now-a-days there is nothing more difficult than to say bravely I _do not_ know." Yes, I accept that modest statement from a great man but I cannot help casting about for an answer! The Truth is somewhere, perhaps in

Utopia, even at the bottom of a well. There is something on a different plane than sophistry, poetical rhapsody. There is a great deal to be said for emotion, it is our strongest instinct. Reading Indian, Egyptian, Greek and Christian philosophy are we not drawn into the atmosphere of Rhapsody and Fancy? Even into a land of dreams if so we please to call Ideals. However they may urge Reason against Emotion, none of the great philosophers succeed in doing it themselves. If they did they would fall quite flat, because we who read are creatures of emotional instincts. All the great philosophers, though they wrote in prose, were poets, not by choice but necessity. Absolutely materialistic philosophy is, happily, rare. It may lay hold of certain minds for a time, but being contrary to our higher instincts its grip is only partial, unsatisfying and ephemeral. The great philosophers live in a land of Dreams or Ideals, a land from which mankind is always as substance. We want the dreams to come True as children do after hearing a fairy story. Plato, Confucius, Buddha, Aristotle, Paul, Kant, Hegel, Spinoza, even Comte were idealists, builders of Utopia. They tried their minds in a furnace of difficulties, their chief effort was to reconcile emotion and reason.

They tried to account for _Feeling_ by Reason. However far Reason may travel, there is a point where it is arrested; speculation starts afresh. It is the poetry in all mythology, not its probability, which is neither here nor there, which touches the human heart; it is that which detains us and holds us fast. It is the poetry of Love that underlies the exquisite verse of Apulius. The story of the Soul of Love it is. French novels, marvellously clever, tell us the other side. I back Apulius' story of Cupid and Psyche to outlive most of them. It is the abstract poetry of the wanderings of Osiris, not the philosophy built upon it,

that engrosses us. The myth of the Delphic oracle, an inspired pastoral, clings when the Delphic oracle is no more. Goats and sheep skipping in rhapsody, their shepherd afterwards giving way to the _mania_ of prophecy, enchanted by the voice of Apollo from a bubbling stream, have more to say for us than the oracle said to the Greeks afterwards in a stately temple. There is something instinctively true in the first emotion, something untrue in the political use made of it by priests and politicians. It is not the political use made of Nature myths which we admire, but the imagination of a highly endowed temperament from which they sprang in the golden age of emotional invention, unrestrained by reason, yet having at the root a _True Ideal_. Psyche personated the soul! The poets have answered our question more simply than the philosophers, who have ploughed over the ground already sown with beautiful flowers, and not seldom have sown weeds on it.

The Churches have added nothing to the beauty of the Christian story. In their efforts to codify it and convert its simplicity into dogmatic and puzzling creeds, upon acceptance of which or not depends the salvation or damnation of the human race, they have not improved or better interpreted the amazing mystery which threads its way in and out among a tapestry of exquisite design. In their effort to materialise the spiritual or Ethos of the story they have often played havoc with it. As a wondrous story full of humanity it has passed through the fire of sophism, politics and Churchcraft, and remains as it was--a product of simple poetical mystical inspiration, and as such it will always touch the world. Whoever wrote the first chapter of Genesis was a great poet who has inspired multitudes, not by his science, which was _nil_, but by a poetic truth incomparably delightful and mythically

true, It inspired M. Angelo, Raphael, and a host of great artists. Milton expanded and retold it in his immortal verse. It has supplied inspiration to musicians, and scientific men have done battle among themselves and over a Poem. Thus have they done it honour. If in details what is related breaks down under the cold light of science, what does that matter? The soul survives. The allegory is complete, the parable is untouched. If the mighty scenes portrayed with simple dignity and unapproachable reserve do not accord with the teachings of science, does that matter? Not one whit! The story is the same, as Homer's tale of the Siege of Troy is the same, whoever wrote it or when it was written. Whether the "Iliad" was put together by travelling minstrels' stories edited by Homer or his invention has nothing to do with its value as a poem. The history of the Jews, as related in the Bible, is full of strange and direct dealings with miraculous events which no science or sense can accept. What does it matter that the historian made a blunder in astronomy? It was not his business. We all know that the sun did not stand still for Joshua. The historian wrote for patriots, not for astronomers. To him the earth was stationary and flat, the sun rising and setting each day. Even now, with all our science, we talk of the setting and rising of the sun because it looks like that. To the people of that time the stars were as lamps slung from the blue vault of heaven, not at all a bad figure of the truth, they look so to us, and to-day Arabs speak of them as "lamps."

§ 2

A new star, the story of the birth of Christ tells, guided the kings to the manger, where lay a girl-mother and her newborn child. She, one "of the people," her reverent custodian a carpenter. That was what

they went to see, and the new star was their guide. We need not take that literally; it is far more beautiful symbolically, figuratively, poetically: a new light was dawning upon a worn out faith, a new symbol of the Spirit of God arose, and not out of a palace or as a child of kings, but from a manger, from a straw bed, from a girl of the people and a craftsman. Not only did the three kings come thither guided by light in their hearts, but simple mountain shepherds too from their sheepfolds came. An angel of the heavenly host, three Oriental kings, a few shepherds, a maid, a carpenter, and a little child were the first actors in a great drama that has moved the world for two thousand years.

A shepherd, a flock of goats, a bubbling fountain form the _dramatis personæ_ of the myth of Apollo's oracle at Delphi. From that sprang the Pithea and the thousands of votive statues for which Delphi became famous. Its temples and universities, its priests and politicians degraded the myth to a level of lies and deceit. "God set a bow in the sky for a sign." How does it affect the promise that we know how the bow came there? We remember the promise in the poem. We are not concerned with the structure of the bow. Even now in these materialist days wherever we see the rainbow we recall God's promise which, made or not made to mankind _in fact_, is so told in the poem.

Plato's allegory in the "Phædrus" of the chariot of the soul, the antagonistic steeds Love and Desire, Eros and Himeros, struggling for supremacy, taken literally or judged from a scientific aspect, is nonsense; as a parable it is one of the truest, as a poem one of the most beautiful in Greek literature.

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