PHILOSOPHY WITH NO HOPE IN THE WORLD.

BY WILLIAM WALLACE EVERTS.

The great philosophers from Plato to Mill have had no hope in the world. They were all wise in their generation, but they were not concerned with the next generation. They were philosophers, not prophets or poets. They were guided wholly by experience, and their experience chilled whatever enthusiasm they may have felt in their youth. They were not only wise, but generally good men, measured by the moral standard of the age in which they lived. Some of them—as Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza, Hume, Kant, and Schopenhauer—seemed void of natural affection, and had not love enough to marry. As they grew older, they grew lonely and disconsolate. There was no one to care for them or for them to care for. They had no personal or family interest in the future. Their outlook on life was from a study-window. It was from books. Their contact with society was through flattering pupils or vain and selfish courtiers. With such surroundings, how could they help despising their fellowmen? They had no domestic ties to cultivate their affections or direct their attention to the better side of human nature, or to recognize the merits of others. In this abnormal position they lived, surrounded by servants whom they distrusted, helpless in old age. They lacked that “love that can hope where reason would despair”. They were all too cautious to be reformers; and, to secure undisturbed liberty to think, they praised the government that protected them. The golden age was in the past, not in the future; and they soon took up the tale of Hesiod and Daniel, and discoursed of the silver, brass, iron, and clay ages that had followed. If they arose to the conception of a rising cycle in human affairs, the “whirligig of time must bring in its revenges”; and thus “the native hue of

resolution was sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought". They were, as their portraits indicate, down at the mouth, "remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow". Mill was the first and only one who favored democracy, religious liberty, or the separation of Church and State.

"Athens, the eye of Greece, mother of arts and eloquence," offered Plato, her most distinguished citizen,

"The olive grove of Academe,
Plato's retirement, where the Attic bird
Trills her thick-warbled notes the summer long."

Plato, the father of idealism, pictured in the *Republic* the ideal city. In it all things, including women, should be held in common. Private property, the cause of strife and root of evil, should be abolished. Where private ownership is allowed, there is a city of pigs. Private rights must be subordinated to the government,—a government of philosophers. If philosophers found a perfect state, it will be seen that philosophy is divine. He detested the democratic rule of Athens, where the bulk of men of little importance rule. There is no hope for men of inferior metal. At Athens freedom means license and anarchy. Equality is the equality of the unequal. Modesty is simple, and moderation is weakness. There is no discipline for vice, and no honor for virtue. Men of lofty character are ostracized. An oligarchy is no better, for the rulers are like shepherd-dogs, that become wolves and devour the sheep. He admitted in the "Laws", published later, that his ideal would be possible only if the citizens were gods or sons of gods. In this volume he retracted the promised equality of men and women. Slavery he regarded as a permanent institution for all but the favored Greeks. He foresaw nothing but perpetual war between different tribes of earth. He said that we cannot tell whether men have been made by the gods for their amusement or for a serious purpose. In the "Timaeus" he discoursed of the good soul of the world, but in the "Laws"

he dilates on the evil soul. He sought for good by withdrawing from the world, where the eyes and the ears are filled with deceptions. The body is the prison, the grave of the soul. Evil is necessary, and cannot be destroyed. And so a sublime melancholy shaded his brow as he beheld his Athenians given up to festivals, not knowing what good thing to do, a mere plaything of the gods and the evil soul of the world.

Aristotle, "master of those who know", in Dante's phrase, tutor of Alexander the Great, qualified some of the positions taken by his teacher Plato. For instance, he insisted upon the rights of private property, and he made room in government for representation of the middle classes and poor freemen; but he regarded slavery as a custom, a law of nature, and slaves as live tools. He started to write a treatise on an ideal city, but he turned from that difficult task to discourse on music and oratory. He regarded evil at first as a mere limitation; but when he came to treat of ethics, he found it to be a reality. He subordinated the individual and the family to the State; and naturally, as teacher of King Alexander, he favored the monarchy. What he said of other noble men was true of himself; for, as he viewed human frivolity and misery, he was moved to sadness and grief.

Descartes said, "You can't prove anything by history. Reason is the only judge". He taught what he called "provisional morality", the traditional and customary morality. It is better to change your desires than the order of the world. His leading principle was that clear thought is true, but he never attained clear thought as to morals. He would not write on morals, because he knew it would subject him to calumny, and, besides, only sovereigns have the right to regulate the morals of others. So he fell in with the common custom of the day and kept a mistress, and would not marry her even after she had borne him a daughter, whom he named Francine. He

censured those blundering and restless humors ever ready to propose unasked-for reforms. The only reform he especially favored was sanitary, by which he planned to live longer than the Patriarchs. For some reason he was alienated from his family, and was greatly mortified when he was not notified of the death of his father. Though he had fled from a monarchy in France to find shelter in the Republic of Holland, he remained at heart a monarchist; for he wrote of the execution of Charles I of England, that "his death was more glorious, more happy, more precious, because the circumstances call forth universal pity, praise, and regret from all who have any fellow-feeling or sympathy".

Hobbes opposed Cromwell and the Long Parliament; and in his "*Leviathan*" and "*Behemoth*," written just before and after the beheading of Charles I, he showed the reaction of his timorous spirit and calculating intellect against the enthusiasm and the anarchy of the civil war in his defense of absolute monarchy. His first premise was that society began in a state of war. His second was that the people made a contract by which they surrendered their rights to a king on condition that they should be protected. He sought to put religious as well as civil authority under one head. He went so far as to say that the question whether the world had a beginning or no must be decided, not by argument, but by the authority of the magistrate. Man is by nature absolutely selfish, and selfishness is the motive of all his acts. Might makes right, and you have no rights unless you can defend them.

Spinoza, a Portuguese Jew, settled in Holland, came under the influence of Descartes and Hobbes, and uttered their sentiments so boldly that he was banished from the synagogue. In 1656, after the Spanish yoke had been broken, he published his "*Tractatus Theologico Politicus*", in which he praised the Republic and its popular

liberties; but in 1672, when a Republican mob seized and assassinated the Wit brothers, his friends and patrons, he prepared his chief work, the "*Tractatus Politicus*", in which he claimed that a democracy cannot last, and only an aristocratic government can. He maintained with Hobbes that the secular and the holy are destroyed if the Church is absolutely independent of the State. All men are alike. Virtue has always been exceedingly rare. It is a complete misunderstanding of the world to imagine that it can be made better. A strong, stable, and absolute civil government is the highest instrument of moral and political progress, happiness, peace, and prosperity. Who can wonder, that, holding such sentiments, his face was covered with a veil of doubt, melancholy, and pain?

When we come to John Locke, we certainly expect better things. Was he not the advocate of the glorious English Revolution, and author of a great treatise on "Toleration"? But he had his limitations. In the constitution he wrote for the English Colony of Carolina he expressly excluded atheists from becoming citizens; and in England his toleration did not include Romanists, "who deliver themselves up to the protection and service of another prince". In morals he did not advance beyond the position taken by Descartes; for he taught his pupil, the Earl of Shaftesbury, that virtue has no other measure, law, or rule than fashion or custom.

Leibnitz, the optimist, the author of a "*Theodicy*", who taught Pope and Voltaire that this is the best possible world, had no hope of any better. He exclaimed, "Oh, if it were only the fashion to be virtuous!" He devoted all his energies to the reunion of Christendom; and when he found it impossible, he still insisted that it was desirable. He agreed that, if the world advances toward perfection, it is sure to recede; for progress is finite, but evil is infinite. The crowning misfortune of his life came when, after he had succeeded in making Duke George of Han-

nover King George of England, he was prevented from joining the royal retinue because the men of science of England objected to the coming of the man who had disputed with Sir Isaac Newton as to the invention of the differential calculus. Is it any wonder that Leibnitz lost hope in the world?

Of Hume, the sceptic, we shall expect gloomy forebodings, and we shall not be disappointed. In 1777, in the preface to a second edition of his "Treatise on the Human Understanding," Hume says, "The author desires that the following pieces alone should be regarded as containing his philosophical sentiments and principles." This volume he closes with these words: "When we run over our library, what havoc must we make! If we take in our hands any volume of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance, let us ask, does it contain any experimental reason concerning matters of fact and existence? No. Commit it, then, to the flames, for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion." Again he says, "Into the fire with all books of metaphysics and theology, with all except mathematics and physics. In a spleetic humor I would take my own books and throw them all into the fire, and doubt everything, and believe nothing, and be a fool, like all others. I am confounded with that forlorn solitude in which I am placed in my philosophy. I see plainly that philosophy has no healing power. It is fortunate that when reason cannot drive away the clouds, nature comes and heals the philosopher's delirium, the sceptic's melancholy. Life is a sorrowful waste of time, and a world full of battlefields, prisons, and hospitals, which pass in ceaseless struggle for existence, and it needs pleasures to make it endurable." Then his ruling passion revives; and he cries, "If I could live a few years longer, I might have the satisfaction of seeing the downfall of superstition."

Kant, as a disciple of Wolf and Leibnitz, proclaimed this the best possible world. He closes his theodicy with

this apostrophe: "Hail to us, we are! The Creator has pleasure in us. Endless space and eternal time, under the eye of the All-Wise, will open up the treasures of creation in their entire extent, and I will evermore see that the whole is the best, and for the sake of the whole all is good." But in 1791, reacting against the scepticism of Hume, he contradicted all that he had said before, in a volume entitled "The Failure of All Philosophical Essays in Theodicy." His philosophy headed up with the doctrine of radical evil. Moral evil is in us, but we cannot account for its presence. A man may be legally good, but not really good without regeneration. An evil spirit dwells in us with the good. How a man naturally bad can make himself good is beyond our comprehension, for how can an evil tree bear good fruit? We ought, and we can with incomprehensible higher help, become good. Gradual reform will not succeed. There must be a revolution in the disposition, and one can become a new man only by a new birth (John iii. 5). In 1795, like Moses on Mount Pisgah, he had a vision of eternal peace. The highest political good he saw in the distant future, at the end of the history of the world. He recommended ceaseless labor for an unattainable goal. The last thing to be reached will be a civilized society that will realize law everywhere. All wars are an experiment toward the orderly relation of States to one another. We should seek first the kingdom of the practical reason. The goal in history is an ideal which in reality never will be fulfilled. A shadow falls,—the shadow of the incapacity of the real for the ideal. We live in a world that antagonizes us, which contradicts what ought to be,—a contradiction which we cannot think out as ending. Human affairs taken in the large are almost always a paradox. At one time Kant defended the French Revolution and popular rights; but afterwards he defended absolute monarchy, and denied popular rights, when he said, "The supreme executive

and judicial powers once established, no resistance to them can be tolerated."

Fichte, in 1813, revived Plato's ideal state without private property or marriage, with no gold or silver coins, with no foreign trade. He said that no one hates good because it is good, or does evil for love of it. Evil is done because it is natural to do it. Nature does it, not man. Being as men are, they cannot do otherwise. My own generation is lost. There must be an entire change in mankind. The highest state of society is purified anarchy, but it may be myriads of myriads of years away. Spiritual perfection is never reachable by any individual; but it is postulated by the moral law, and involves an infinite progress. For a time he was inspired with Kant's vision of eternal peace, and said, "The destiny of our race is to be united into one body, completely in accord with itself and uniformly developed, when all useful things have been discovered: then, without stay or relapse, with united forces, marching in step, men will steadily rise to a culture of which we can at present form no conception."

Schelling started with Kant as an optimist, but through pantheism he became a pessimist. He looked out upon nature through a veil of despondency, with a deep melancholy that could not be avoided. The prevailing attitude of his mind is revealed by the last word that fell from his lips,—“but.” He found no constant progress in history, from lower to higher, from bad to better. There is no rational foundation for the world. He was so far from being a reformer, that he called revolution paricide, that leads to the glorification of the people, to a democratic republic of the masses, without distinction.

Hegel united pessimism and optimism. As he looked at a cross-section of humanity, he pronounced it evil; but when he observed its movement, he considered it good. He found a place for negation as an integral part of reason. The world spirit is borne by the leading races.

Others have no right against the absolute right of the leading races. The national state is the highest possible form of society. War is the normal solution for international disputes. No one was so popular with the military caste in Berlin as Professor Hegel. As waters foul without movement, he said, so do nations in peace. The height of human freedom is found in Prussia. The State is God come down in the likeness of men. The King is the political soul of the world. No holy religious conscience would oppose the government. The spirit of the people is seen, not in parliamentary struggles, but in the national constitution. The course of the world conquers virtue, which is a non-essential abstraction, an empty word, that lifts the heart, but leaves the reason bare.

Jean Paul Richter compares Schopenhauer to a lake in the midst of the mountains of Norway which is never touched by the sunlight. Francis Bowen says that it is hard to believe that there was any element of goodness in him. He delighted in the biting satires of Voltaire and Helvetius, and eagerly devoured the hopeless philosophy of India. He quarreled with his mother and his sister, and sympathized with no one. All life is suffering, he said, and suffering originates in will and effort. The world is the result of blind and unfounded will. It is evil through and through. If it were a little worse, it could not exist. His tone was acrid, bitter, splenetic, vituperative. His wit was gall. His eloquence was gloomy. He was a strenuous advocate of absolutism. The more I see of men, the less I like them. Death is welcome as the highest good.

Hartmann set aside the results of ancient wisdom and ancient reverence. In Genesis we are told that creation was very good, but Hartmann declared it very bad. On the portal of the universe are inscribed the words "Leave hope behind, ye who enter here." The only hope left to him was that the miserable round of cosmic events will

not be repeated *ad infinitum*. Existence is incomplete, irrational, a huge blunder. Vice and misery will continue to increase. The only goal is race suicide. Men will seek after extinction, and find it in a collective and concerted act of self-destruction.

John Stuart Mill was a democrat; yet in his autobiography he expressed alarm at the brutality and ignorance of the lowest classes, and doubted whether liberty would not mean the despotic rule of the ignorant. He was a communist at heart; but he did not think that the time was ripe for the doing-away with private property, as compensation is indispensable to progress. He was more concerned about the rights of the public than those of families. He stole the affections of Mrs. Taylor from her husband for twenty years; but he waited two years after the death of her husband before marrying her, and after her death at Avignon he settled near by to keep her grave green. Mary Taylor, in her "Private Life of Mill," says that Mill's letters to his own family contained scornful wounding words, and were cruel and insulting. He was a reformer, but he concluded that philanthropies and reforms do more to prevent relapse than to assist progress. The realization of human hopes is beyond the pale of possibility. The notion of a Providence must be entirely dismissed. He was much given to melancholy. "I will not, if I can help it," he said, "give way to gloom and morbid despondency. I will and must master it, or it will master me. Whenever it has come to me, it has always lasted many months, and has gone off in most cases very gradually. I have allowed myself to be paralyzed more than I should during the last month or two by these gloomy feelings, though I have had interregna of comparative brightness, but they were short."