THE FIFTH GOSPEL.

EVERY revelation granted to man is at the outset denounced as atheistic and sacrilegious. The flash that follows the "Let there be light" sadly changes the faces of the gods, whether they be the Dragons born of man's fingers, or the Dogmas of his fancy, as they stand in their twilight shrines, thick with the smoke of incense or hazy with the "dim religious light" of mystic contemplation. Not only this, but the dazzling glare pains to the blinding-point the eye of faith until the familiar features, nay, even the majestic outlines of the Divine Form seem utterly lost, and it is little wonder that the shuddering cry goes up, "Great Pan is dead!" The instant impulse, almost too strong to be resisted, is to turn the back upon the light which has wrought this havoc, declare it a bale-fire, an *ignis fatuus*, a lying illumination, and thus save both eyes and theology. There is plenty of darkness left to construct another shrine. And this is the course usually taken in point of fact, but is it wisest, not to say bravest, or manliest? Whoever follows it, proves himself to have been worshipping, *not* the Deity, but his own pet conception of Him; Light cannot alter Being, only its appearance. And yet "Thou that destroyest the law and the prophets" is the denunciation hurled at every new light-bringer.

A courageous few, however, turn and unshrinkingly face the dazzling ray of golden sunlight which has shot unbidden across the purple twilight of the sanctuary, proudly secure that whatever is true cannot be altered, whatever is untrue is unworthy of their homage. As ever the bravest course is the happiest, and although the shrine is seen shattered and empty, while the rich vestments, brain-woven and fancy-dyed, with which, with unconscious irony,

divinity has been "adorned," lie folded upon the floor like the grave-clothes at the feet of Lazarus, yet the roof is found to have been but a veil of twilight and shadows, and heaven above is revealed.

And as their glad eyes gaze up into the sapphire, star-sprinkled vault, they are again aware of a Presence of far lovelier, though vaguer outline, and though more remote, of a grandeur never before conceived.

This is peculiarly true of that great burst of eternal truth which broke upon the world chiefly through the work and genius of Charles Darwin. Its dawning was heralded by a shudder and a shriek from every pew and pulpit, and "Darwinism" became a synonym for blasphemy. Its truth was vehemently denied, its logic mercilessly ridiculed, its "debasing tendencies" furiously denounced. It was to be given no quarter, for if tolerated for a moment it would utterly destroy every vestige not only of religion, but of the religious spirit, and yet I venture to herald it to-day as the long-missing "Fifth Evangel," "The Gospel according to Darwin." Instead of destroying the religious spirit, it reanimates it, and places it upon stronger foundations than ever before.

This may seem an extravagant and extraordinary statement, but it can be shown to be far from unfounded. In the first place, it restores the grand unity of the universe, and proves the fundamental harmony of its conflicting forces. There is no hanging in the balance between the forces of good and evil, no perilous and often doubtful conflict between a beneficent World Spirit and a malevolent one: no such thing as abstract or essential "evil": nothing but a magnificent scheme of glorious progress through conflict. Storm and darkness, hunger and cold, war and wanderings, nay, even pestilence and famine, are seen to be spurs to progress, mothers of invention, and the stern nurses of all the virtues. Never has the doctrine of the Old Gospel that "all things work together for good to them that love the Good" received such tremendous endorsement. Instead of gazing upon a world of blind, remorseless chance, or inevitable fate, so full of cruelty, injustice, and needless suffering, as to absolutely require the conception or invention of "another

world," to even partially remedy its inequalities, the Darwinist sees all things and all forces moving steadily forward in one grand and gloriously beneficent scheme of advancement. Nature's only and unvarying war-cry is "Excelsior!"

The old Evangelists did at times catch glimpses of this truth from the mountain-peaks of their loftiest spiritual raptures, but it was soon lost sight of in the mist of the valley and fog of the fen, into which the churches were plunged in that palsied time which heralded the death of the great Roman Empire.

None of them, however, even dreamed of a light which should reveal a harmony and an order in that far more bitter, more hopeless and perplexing conflict which is incessantly present in the soul of man itself. Even to Paul's magnificent intellect, the only possible result is that one of the conflicting forces *must* and inevitably will utterly destroy the other. "The carnal mind is enmity against God, and is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be. . . . To be carnally minded is death." In the mild radiance of the Fifth Gospel even this struggle, like every other, is seen to surely and inevitably result in progress, to which both forces are absolutely necessary. The "enmity" between them is merely that between the steam-chest and the driving-wheel in the great engine, or, more accurately, between the panting young giant in the cylinder and the piston-rod, each fiercely asserting itself against the other, and between them driving the great wheel. Browning has caught the same ray of dawn when he cries :

"As the bird wings and sings

Let us cry, "All good things

Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh helps soul."

Our passions and appetites are seen to be the great driving forces of our nature, and even the term "animal," as applied to them, carries with it no stigma of degradation ; on the contrary, it suggests much that is brave, faithful, and self-denying. By far the longest, and not by any means the least noble part of our pedigree lies outside of the human family.

One of Darwin's greatest services was the proving that our

moral impulses are derived, not from education nor external revelation, nor from the cold calculations and experimental deductions of "refined selfishness," according to either Bentham or Spencer, but from the warm and beautiful family affections, those ties of blood, whose golden links are alike binding upon the dove upon its nest, the deer in its covert, the lioness in her lair, and the mother by the hearthstone. The courage, the patience, the cheerfulness, the affections, that are in us are just as essentially "carnal" as are the "lusts of the flesh" and the "pride of life," and what is more, are more numerous and more powerful. Our deepest and strongest instincts in the long run are found to be on the side of "right."

The most exquisite result of this perception is a delicious sense of harmony and sympathy with nature and all that she contains. The world is no longer either "vile" or "unfriendly" in either its human or its physical aspects. "The Prince of the Power of it" has disappeared; all men of all races become brethren upon the common ground of the great, noble, primitive instincts, and even the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air are glowing with that "touch of nature" which "makes the whole world kin." The only thing in it that we could profitably alter is our own conceited, babyish selves.

Another proof of the inspiration of the Fifth Gospel is the calm and rational view which it enables us to take of death. To remove the fear of this has been a leading aim of all former revelations, but it is to be doubted whether they have not rather intensified it, as they all unite in characterising it as the King of Terrors, the bitterness of evils, and the great enemy of the race.

The new light pierces these grisly, ghostly draperies, woven of fear and darkness, and shows behind them a gentle, painless, grandly-beneficent process of nature, by which the old is tenderly and reverently laid away to dissolve and reappear in the new.

Bracken dies and enriches the mold so that the anemone, violet, and the primrose may lift their dainty heads and scatter their perfume through copse and glen. Here is the Resurrection of the Body. Nothing is lost, but much is gained by the change.

The Mexican aloe lives a century, scatters its myriad seeds,

then peacefully fades and dies, but its seeds take root upon its very grave, and give birth to other winged seeds, and so on through thousands of centuries. The vital spark has never once gone out, but burns with a brighter, richer, intenser glow in each succeeding generation. The primitive aloe is still alive and in a fuller, richer sense than ever before. This is Life Eternal, and what is better, Life Improving. Is not this a nobler, higher, more unselfish conception than that of an indefinite prolongation of our own petty, personal existence? This is an immortality worth having, for it provides for progress.

We are immortal physically in the course of nature, and mentally and morally in our influence, so far as this is for good. All that is true, all that is good in us and in our influence, will survive to all the ages: all that is false and base will be ruthlessly crushed and destroyed, ground into powder by the mills of the gods. It is not a question of whether we, as a whole, will be "saved" or "lost" but of how much of us.

Even if I have been heard this far without indignant interruptions, a dozen voices which can no longer be restrained, now burst out with the question, "But what possible claim to the title of a 'Gospel,' a 'Good News,' can be made by a revelation, the chief factor and very essence of whose 'plan of salvation' is a fierce conflict of physical force, a contest of tooth and claw, in which of necessity mere brute strength and selfishness must prove the victorious qualities?"

But is this last apparently self-evident conclusion, a logical one? It most emphatically is not! And, further, strange as it may seem, is flatly contradicted by the facts. Not only has the decrease of selfishness and the growth of the affections been one of the most prominent features in the upward development of the forms of being, but it has also been a most important factor in that progress. The supremacy of intelligence in the struggle for existence is universally admitted, and the chief training-school, if not the very birth-place of this intelligence, is in the care for others, first inspired by parental affection.

Nothing but the lowest degree of intelligence or development

is possible without affection. The crocodile, the shark, and the viper are models, not only of cruelty and ferocity, but of stupidity and dulness. It is no mere coincidence that that great kingdom of living forms whose distinguishing and proudest characteristic is the possession of a milk-gland (a purely *altruistic* organ) should far out-rank all others in beauty, vigor, and cerebral development. If they could be said to have any rivals in this last characteristic, it would be those patient but brilliant little toilers, the ants and the bees, whose whole existence is literally a slavery to, or martyrdom for, others.

War and conflict are extraordinary breeders of intelligence, but co-operation and protection are even greater. Not only are mammals far superior to all the other classes of life of living forms because they suckle their young, instead of leaving them to the tender mercies of the waves and the sun, but among them by far the most intelligent and most secure from hostile attack are those which group themselves together in more or less firmly-organised packs or herds.

Compare for a moment the dog, the horse, the elephant, with the tiger, the bear, the wild boar. Indeed an accurate classification of the intelligence and perfection of living forms could be made upon the basis of the degree of care they take of their offspring, and of unselfish interest in their kind. The same truth holds good through the different grades of the human family itself. The mere fact that the weak cannot command justice, not only stamps any tribe as barbarous, but just as certainly keeps it so, and as we go down the scale, we finally reach a point where justice, humanity, and even family affection sink to the very lowest ebb, and with them inexorably culture, intelligence, and fighting power. The very name of the "man-of-the-woods," the "*homo silvaticus*," "salvage," "savage" has become a synonym for cruelty and ferocious indifference to the rights of others. The savage is the very incarnation of aggression, remorseless selfishness, the *beau ideal* of the man most likely to "survive in the struggle for existence" according to popular and theological conception, but does that make him even the best fighting-man in the world? The question answers itself. A

mere handful of civilised troops can scatter swarms of savage bowmen or even riflemen, simply by virtue of their confidence in one another. Selfishness is a great force, but affection is a greater. Sweetness, and light, and love, and beauty abound in the higher types, both animal and human, because they are emphatically the winning qualities in the upward struggle.

Stronger far than the crashing sweep of the hurricane or the thunderous rush of the storm-stirred Atlantic, keener and more penetrating than the blackest and bitterest frost or the jagged spear of the lightning is the sweet, golden sunshine, the loveliest and the strongest thing in the world. Beauty and morality are abundantly able to take care of themselves in the fiercest struggle without any assistance from either academies or religions.

Let no one, however, imagine for a moment that a flabby æstheticism or weak amiability can fill the requirements for survival. Far from it. Valuable and powerful as are love and beauty, the one virtue which is absolutely indispensable, and separated from which they are of little avail, is courage; clear, indomitable, inexhaustible. Though the former are unquestionably the controlling and moulding influences of progress, the latter is the great positive motive force. The one unpardonable sin is cowardice. Kind intentions, without the courage to carry them into effect, are of but little value either to their object or their possessor. Courage is not only the basis, but the very mother of the virtues. The thoroughly brave man is almost never cruel, treacherous, or untruthful. Its absence is not only the provoker, but the very essence of the majority of the vices. It is cowardice that literally makes the liar, the cheat, the traitor; courage, the Washington, the patriot, the reformer.

In spite of his harsh features and rude manners, this fierce, reckless, battle-loving, but warm-hearted old Titan is clearly the chief of all the virtues, instead of a creature to be ignored or even discountenanced, except in certain "moral" forms, as he is regarded by that effeminate and rose-water essence which many Christians extract from the Fourth Gospel.

One of the strongest claims of the Fifth Gospel is the light which it throws upon that problem, "The Origin and Relations of

Evil." By its rays evil is seen, and can even be demonstrated to be mainly one of the necessary accompaniments of the development of Good into Better. If movement is to occur, it must be possible in all directions, and the power of advancing inevitably carries with it the possibility of retreat. The possibility of growth must include that of decay. Evil is the shadow thrown by the sunlight of the good. Good is positive and absolute; evil is negative and relative. Almost every evil, viewed broadly and attentively, is seen to be at bottom mainly a relative or temporary absence of good, and in many cases, repulsive as it may be at first sight, to be ultimately beneficent in its nature.

More than this, much of what we term evil is a necessary part of the scheme of progress. To use a mechanical illustration, not only is falling an indispensable corollary of, or antithesis to, rising, but also an essential factor in forward motion. That incarnate poetry of motion, the flight of the lordly eagle, consists of a quick, short dash, with a few score strokes of his powerful wings to a dizzy height, followed by a circling, swooping, triumphant descent on motionless, outstretched pinions, a veritable riding upon the wings of the wind, covering half a country-side in its sweep. Here progress is attained, not so much by the rise, as by the long, sweeping descent which follows it, and *both* movements are alike indispensable.

To soar aloft merely to brave the eye of the sun-god, or to excite the admiration and reverence of the rest of the feathered tribes, as the classic myth of the kingly bird supposes, would be simply a fruitless and foolish waste of energy; and yet in the spiritual realm, many a pinnacle of saintliness, many a state of ecstasy, has been attained from highly similar motives, and proved equally barren of results. Much of what we term absolute good would be sterile unless mixed with apparent evil. The whole process of human locomotion, not only physical but mental, is literally a series of interrupted falls. Our only chance of advancing is to fall in the right direction and keep at it. Our only struggle should be, not to avoid falling, but to fall forward.

Of all the innumerable forms of evil probably none is so obtru-

sively self-evident, or so universally denounced and deplored by philosophers of every system, priests of every creed, and observers of every age, as pain. On its presence and frequency alone have been founded most of the doubts and denials of the goodness of God, or the benevolence of the universe. It is generally accepted as almost pure evil, and by its mere presence, a standing reflexion upon the intelligence and competence of the Great Architect. The sight, or even thought, of suffering is abhorrent to us, and we are sure that "Providence" ought not to "permit" it in any form. But is not this, after all, a somewhat short-sighted and childish way of regarding the question? Pain is indeed hard to bear, and harder to look upon, but is there no harvest which its sharp sickle reaps? Of a surety there is, and a golden one, which can be gathered by no other means.

First and foremost of all, pain is the great danger-signal of nature, the spark struck from the clash of the organism against its environment. Heed its warning, avoid or remove its cause, and all will be well; neglect it, and a worse thing will befall us. It is the cry of the frightened tissues for help, and there is usually plenty of time for this to reach them if we send promptly on hearing the alarm. Without pain, in times of danger, we should be half dead before we knew we were ill. Cut the nerve which supplies a rabbit's eye and lids with common sensation, leaving everything else untouched, and what is the result? The eye soon becomes suffused, then the crystal cornea becomes clouded, next inflamed, and finally suppuration sets in, and the eye is lost. What can have caused this, for the sight was still perfect, the lids uninjured and active as ever, and the circulation unimpaired? Simply the fact that sensation being destroyed and pain prevented, the lids did not know when or how to close, nor the lachrymal glands when to secrete, and the delicate cornea was dried and cracked by the air and rasped by the dust till it blazed up into fatal inflammation. The presence of pain is distressing, but its *absence* is fatal.

Again, it is impossible from a philosophic point of view to ignore the fact that pain, or the dread of it, has been, and yet is, an extraordinary, a most powerful and constant stimulus to progress.

Take for instance the milder forms of it, known as discomfort, such as hunger, cold, etc., and what an important part of our actions do they even yet determine. How much work would we do if we were suddenly removed from all fear of them? Fully two-thirds of the turrets and battlements of that magnificent pile which we call modern civilisation have been reared under the lash of these stern but beneficent task-masters. Considered as a motive power alone, hunger has few equals.

If necessity be the mother of invention, then pain is the father of scientific discovery. So long as the influences of our surroundings and the workings of our own internal mechanism are productive of pleasurable or indifferent sensations, we are content to lie at ease, like a basking cat in the sun, or like the lotus-eaters "careless of gods and men," without troubling our heads for a moment about the nature, structure, or causes of these things. "Let well enough alone" is our motto. Let discomfort occur, however, and we are at once acutely interested in finding out all about them, and science is born. The healthy man doesn't know he has such a thing as a stomach, the dyspeptic doesn't know he has anything else. In the realm of morals, the "sweetness" of the "uses of adversity" has been universally admitted, while in that part of the physical field which terms itself the spiritual, the value, nay, even essential, meritoriousness of suffering has been so sadly exaggerated, that I almost fear to bring discredit upon my argument by alluding to it.

And here is where the Fifth Gospel gently but decidedly parts company with the Fourth. Although it goes even further in the direction of proving the necessity and even the beneficence of pain, it stops far short of exalting mere suffering into a virtue, or regarding it as the dominant and commonest element in the lot of mankind. The essential benefit of pain lies in the avoidance of its cause, and the reward is to be reaped from the thorny barrens of discomfort by determined effort and incessant struggle and not by tame and pulpy submission. It has no sympathy whatever with the morbid delusion that suffering is *per se* purifying and exalting, and the mere endurance of it a grace; still less that the submission to it is the one principal duty of man. It declines to regard this sun-

kissed, grass-carpeted, flower-gemmed world of ours as a "vale of tears" or "wilderness of woe," and instead of holding that the more disagreeable anything is, the more likely it is to be "good for us," it would deem the fact of any object or action being repugnant to our natural tastes and instincts as at least good presumptive evidence of its injuriousness.

It furnishes a scientific and rational basis for Pestalozzi's dictum that "we do not desire certain things because we believe them to be good, but we hold them to be good because we instinctively desire them." It unhesitatingly declares enjoyment (harmony with environment) to be the normal condition of organised being, suffering the abnormal—comfort the rule, pain the exception; in short, our appetites, impulses, and instincts are the exquisite fruits of the experience of myriads of ancestral generations. If anything about us be divine, they emphatically are, and may be, freely, boldly, joyfully followed—instead of sternly repressed and distorted.

That strange distortion of the teachings of the Master known as orthodox Christianity, which is really a mixture of one-fourth Christ, one-fourth Paul, and one-half pure superstition, regards our passions and appetites as our chiefest enemies, necessary evils, only valuable for the discipline gained in fighting them, permits their indulgence only under protest and with a sort of an air of sneaking apology, and would like to crush them out entirely were it not for the trifling drawback that life itself would be destroyed in the process. And even this consideration has been, alas, no bar to its zeal, especially in the case of other people. From this belief more than from any other have sprung those dark and disgraceful shadows of monasticism, self-torture, and persecution, which have always dogged and too often utterly dimmed its shining course.

Nature's revenge for this contemptuous treatment of her heralds and prophets is swift and signal, and the carrying out of this belief must logically, and always has, resulted in either asceticism or hypocritical licentiousness, and generally in both.

From the standpoint of the Darwinist, our passions are our best friends and trustiest servants, and our instincts and appetites our safest guides. The one may be humored too far, and the other

followed too blindly; but in the long run they will be found to have done us at least ten times as much good as harm. Like Solomon's "virtuous woman," they will "do us good and not evil all the days of our life." This once recognised, the pleasure which comes from their legitimate gratification becomes something to be freely and frankly enjoyed as a mark of nature's approval, instead of a thing to be ashamed of, acknowledged with apologies, and indulged in with grave misgivings.

In short, joy becomes as integral a part of the Fifth Gospel as grief is of the Fourth.

The grand old Greek "joy of living" comes back in broader, manlier, more enduring form, and is of itself a sufficient reason for existing. Once more the mellow glow of the golden sunlight becomes the smile of the great heart of the universe. The mist-wreath upon the blue mountain, the silver flash of the rushing river between the rich green of the reeds, the gorgeous, crimson pageantry of the hosts of heaven in the western sky, and the amethyst light in the eye of woman, are but reflexions of His beauty; the warbling of birds, the song of the wind in the pine-forests, and the murmuring of pebbly brooks, are the echoes of the music of the spheres, and the joyous response which all these stir up in us is part of the grand sympathy of the universe, the love between those of one blood and one lineage. Nor does "Lebenslust" stop here: far from it. Deeper, but even sweeter and more lasting than any of these is the stern joy of battle, the warm throb which answers the touch of the frost-king, the breath of the storm-wind, the dash of the salt spray over the bulwarks, the plunge of the frantic steed. Best of all, the glorious ecstasy of taking our lives between our teeth, and looking danger and death in the face, of daring everything in defence of our loved ones, the fierce music of the clash of swords, and the rattle of musketry, the sweet "smell of the battle afar off." Life is a brave, red-blooded, warm-hearted, joyous thing, which needs no sickly phantasmic "after-world" to render it worth the living.

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