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"ENTHUSIASM OF THE MARKET-PLACE AND OF THE STUDY."

A DISCOURSE

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BY

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ENTHUSIASM OF THE MARKET-PLACE AND OF THE STUDY.

'Who will absolve you bad Christians?' 'Study,' I replied, 'and Knowledge.'
Conrad Muth in a letter to Peter Eberbach, circa 1510.

THERE are two types of human character which must have impressed themselves even upon those least observant of the phases of life which surround us. Nor is it only in observing the present, but also in studying the past, that we find the same two types influencing, each in its own peculiar fashion, the growth of human thought and the forms of human society. By "studying the past" I do not mean reading a popular historical work, but taking a hundred, or better, fifty years in the life of a nation, and studying that out. Each of us is capable of such a study, although it may require the leisure moments, not of weeks, but of years. It means understanding, not only the politics of that people in those years; not only what their thinkers wrote; not only how the educated classes thought and lived; but in addition how the mass of the folk struggled, and what stirred them to feeling or to action. In this latter respect more may often be learnt from folk-songs and broadsheets than from a whole round of foreign campaigns. Anyone, who has made some such study as I have suggested, will not only have recognised the two opposing types of human character, but be better able to judge of the parts they have played in human development. Without any assertion that one of these types is thoroughly harmful, and only the other of real social value, we may still enquire whether the one be not of more service to humanity than the other, and so socially endeavour to repress the one and cultivate the other. If, on examining longer periods of human history, we find that in the more developed extant societies the first type is tending to recede before the second, we shall have considerable help in arriving at a judgment of their relative social value.

life exists for wider purposes than mere morality; morality is only a condition which renders social life possible. I am moral, not because such is the object of my life, but because by being so I gratify the social impulses impressed upon me by early education, and by hereditary instinct. Gratification of impulse brings pleasure, and pleasure in life is one of the conditions necessary to our grasping it and working it to the full extent of its rich possibilities.

If we agree then that morality is what is social, and immorality what is anti-social, that neither have an absolute or supernatural value, we shall be led to inquire of any course of action how it affects the welfare of society; that is, not only of those whom the action may be towards, but of him who is its source, for both alike belong to human society. To judge whether an action be moral or not we must investigate its effects, not only on *others* but on *self*. Now if the only actions which came before us were murder or brutally-sensual, there would be no difficulty in judging their effect on others or on self, in determining their anti-social character. But most of the actions required in human life are far more difficult of analysis, far more complex in their bearings on others and on self. In addition they often require an immediate decision. When a man decides rapidly on his course of action, we say he is a man of *character;* when his decisions generally prove in the sequel to have been correct, we attribute to him insight or wisdom. We look up to him as a wise man, and endeavour to imitate him, or to learn from him. The insight or wisdom we have thus spoken of, and which is so intimately connected with character, is the result of training, of mental discipline, or of what in the broad sense of the word we may term *education.* It is not only experience of men, but still more a knowledge of the laws which govern human society, of the effects of certain courses of action as manifested in history, nay even of natural laws, whether mechanical or physiological, which govern man because he is a part of nature, that makes up this education. But more, this knowledge, this education in itself, is not sufficient to form what we term a wise man; each truth learnt from science or history must have become a part of a man's existence; the theoretical truth must form such a part of his very being, that it influences almost unconsciously every practical action; the comparatively trivial doings of each day must all be consistent with, I will even say dictated by, those general laws which have been deduced from a study of history and from a study of science. Then and then only a man's actions become certain, harmonious and definite in purpose; then we recognise that we have to deal with a man of character; with a man whose morality is something more than a superstition, an integral part of his thinking being. If a theory of life is worth studying, let its propounder bring evidence that it has moulded his own character, has been the mainspring of his actions. There

that science, only in its infancy, has not yet solved. To such questions we ought to come with the most cautious, the most impartial, the most earnest minds, because their very nature tends to excite our prejudices, to thrust aside our intellectual rule, and so, to warp our judgment. But what do we find in actual life? These questions are brought onto the market-place; made the subject of appeal on the one side to the supernatural, or to some absolute code of morality; on the other side to strong emotions, which, utterly untutored, are the natural outcome of our strong social impulses. Where we might expect a calm appeal to the results of science and the facts of human history, we are confronted with the deity, absolute justice, the moral rights of man, and other terms which are calculated to excite strong feeling, while they successfully screen the yawning void of ignorance.

As a last example, let me point to a problem which is becoming all important to our age—the great social changes, the economic reorganisation, which is pressing upon us. We none of us know exactly what is coming; we are only conscious of a vast feeling of unrest, of discontent with our present social organism, which manifests itself, not in one or two little groups of men, but throughout all the strata of society. The socialistic movement in England would have little meaning if we were to weigh its importance by the existing socialist societies or their organs in the press. It is because we find throughout all classes a decay of the old conceptions of social justice and of the old principles of social action—a growing disbelief in once accepted economic laws—a tendency to question the very foundations of our social system—it is because of these manifestations that we can speak of a great social problem before us. This problem is one of the hardest which a nation can have to work out; one which requires all its energy, and all its intellect; it is fraught with the highest possibilities and the most terrible dangers. Human society cannot be changed in a year, scarcely in a hundred years; its organism is as complex as that of the most differentiated type of physical life; you can destroy that life, ruin that organism, but remould it you cannot without the patient labour of generations, even of centuries. That labour itself must be directed by knowledge, knowledge of the laws which have dictated the rise and decay of human societies, and of those physical influences which manifest themselves in humanity as temperament, impulse, and passion. No single man, no single group of men, no generation of men can remodel human society—their influence when measured in the future will be found wondrously insignificant. They may, if they are strong men of the market-place, produce a German Reformation or a French Revolution; but when the historian not of the outside, but of the inside, comes to investigate that phase of society before and after the movement, what does he find? A great deal of human pain, a great deal of destruction. And of human creation?

century, possibly with Tertullian. "What," writes this Father, "have the philosopher and Christian in common? The disciple of Greece and the disciple of heaven? What have Athens and Jerusalem, the Church and the Academy, heretics and Christians, in common? There is no more curiosity for us, now that Christ has come, nor any occasion for further investigation, since we have the Gospel. . . . . The Son of God is dead; it is right credible, because it is absurd; being buried, he has arisen; it is certain, because it is impossible."

Although there have been periods of history when Christianity has stood in the van of intellectual progress, we must yet hold that she has on the whole, and perhaps not unnaturally, exhibited a suspicion of human reason. She has preferred the methods of the market-place to those of the study; men of words, prophets and orators may be picked up at every street corner; the scholar, the man of thought requires a life-time in the making, and, being made, will he any longer be a Christian? If, and if only, he finds Christianity to be one with the highest knowledge of his age.

I have endeavoured to emphasise this relation of Christianity to intellect, because our current morality is essentially Christian—is essentially a matter of blind feeling—and hence it comes about that we find the statement: *the ignorant cannot be moral*, such a very hard saying. The freethinker, placing on one side the supernatural, finding an all-sufficient religion in the pursuit of truth, in the investigation of law, will surely not be content to accept the old Christian conception of morality? To leave his reason on this point out of account, and appeal to feeling as a test of truth? Let him remember what other teachers, in their way as great or greater than Jesus—greater if we measure them by intellectual power,—have taught. With Gautama the Buddha, knowledge was the key to higher life; right living the outcome of self-culture. Moses the son of Maimon, chief of Jewish philosophers, tells us that evil is the work of infirm souls, and that infirm souls shall seek *the wise*, the physicians of soul. Averroes, the greatest of mediæval freethinkers, whom Christian art depicted with Judas crushed in the jaws of Satan, asserted that knowledge is the only key to perfect living. That Spinoza taught all evil arises from confused ideas, from ignorance, is known to all. If the philosophers, as Tertullian has declaimed, are the patriarchs and prophets of heretics, then surely we freethinkers should attend to what they have taught! But I can give you a still more striking instance of how the men of the study have based morality upon knowledge. I refer to that little band of real workers, the Humanists of the early sixteenth century. Men like Erasmus, Sebastian Brant, and Conrad Muth were working for a real reformation of the German people on the basis of education, of knowledge, of that progress which alone is sure, because it is based on the

Swounds, show me what thou'lt do:
Woo't weep? woo't fight? woo't fast? woo't tear thyself?
Woo't drink up eisel? eat a crocodile?
I'll do't. Dost thou come here to whine?
To outface me with leaping in her grave?
Be buried quick with her and so will I;
And, if thou prate of mountains, let them throw
Millions of acres on us, till our ground,
Singeing his pate against the burning zone,
Make Ossa like a wart! Nay, an thou'lt mouth,
I'll rant as well as thou.

That we freethinkers have not a morality, or only the remnants of an antique faith—prejudices gained from a Christian education which cling like limpets to the rock of our intellectual being—is the libel of ignorance. We *have* a morality, and those who hold it assert that it stands above the Christian dispensation, as the Christian above the Hebrew. Like the Hebrew however it is a matter of law, and the lawgiver is Reason. Reason is the only lawgiver, by whom the intellectual forces of the nineteenth century can be ordered and disciplined. The only practical method of making society as a whole approach the freethinker's ideal of morality is to educate it, to teach it to use its reason in guiding the race instincts or social impulses. Understand what I mean by education. I do not mean mere knowledge of scientific or historic facts; but these facts co-ordinated into laws, and these laws so much a mode of thought, that they are the rules of human action. The *learned* man may not be in any sense of the word *educated*, and is thus frequently immoral. Often what we are accustomed to call education is merely the means to its attainment. You must give your folk—if you wish it to be moral, to have social stability—not only the means of education, but the leisure to pursue that means to its end. Let us put this statement in a more concise form. Society depends for its stability on the morality of the individual. The morality of the individual is co-ordinate with his education. It is therefore a primary function of society to educate its members.

It may seem to some of you a platitude even when I say that to improve the morality of society you must improve its education. Yet how far is this principle carried into practice by our would-be moral reformers? Do they set themselves down to the life-long task of slowly but surely educating their fellows? Or do they rush out onto the market-place, proclaim that God bids men do this or that; that this or that course of action is virtuous, is righteous, is moral, without once troubling to define their words? How many such moral reformers have made that study of science and history, have gained that knowledge of social and physical law which would make them to be moral themselves, still more to guide their fellows? In many of the complex problems of modern life, we

place, but at least in that of the study—is socialism, his religious cult is that pursuit of truth, which, when obtained, directs his moral, his social action. Would that more men of learning were so educated as to recognise this new code of social action! That education is needed for the masses, not that the workman may make ten good screws where he formerly made nine bad ones, but that the workman himself may be capable of moral, that is, social action. Men of science proclaim the need of technical education for the English artizan, if he is to survive in the battle for existence with German and French rivals. A more pitiable plea for technical education could hardly be imagined. We, freethinkers, demand technical education for the workman, because we believe that it enables him to replace a mechanical routine by a series of intelligent acts; we believe that when he is accustomed to intelligent, rather than mechanical action in handicraft, he will no longer be content with a mechanical code of social action; he will begin to inquire and to investigate;—his morality also will become a matter of thought and of knowledge, no longer of faith or of custom. That would indeed be a great step towards social reform, a great advance in social stability. To the freethinkers of the old school, who fancy their mission is to destroy Christianity only, we of the new school cry: 'Go and study Christianity; learn what it, as a purely human institution, has in 1,800 years done and failed to do, then only will you be in a position in destroying to *create*;—to create that religion which is alone foreshadowed in the future.' To the socialists of the old school, who think that revolutionary agitation, paper schemes of social reconstruction, and manifestoes appealing to class passion, are the only possible modes of action, we of the new school cry: 'Go out and educate, create a new morality, the basis of which shall be knowledge, and socialism will come, although in a shape which none of us have imagined. It may need the labour of centuries, but it is the one method of action, which at each step gives us sure foothold. To the firm ground of reason trusts the man who would build for posterity.'

So much then in answer to our first question of the method by which we can approach the moral ideal.

Our second question: *What is the motive force behind this morality?* leads me to a point, which has given the title to this lecture, and presents undoubted difficulty to those who have thrown aside all appeal to the emotions as the motive force in conduct. The energy which enables a man of the market-place to carry out his projects, may be measured by the amount of *enthusiasm* he is capable of raising among his fellow men. To create enthusiasm by an appeal to the emotions, and direct it to a definite goal is essentially the method of the man of the market-place. He does not try to move men through their reasons, he does not try to educate them, but he strives to influence their feelings, to excite their

among a section of his countrymen by expressing his horror at the 'wave of infidelity' he tells us is sweeping across the land; the last Prime Minister raises enthusiasm in another section of his countrymen by employing his leisure in defending what he terms the 'majestic process' of creation described in the first chapter of Genesis. When a writer talks of "the detachment and collection of light, leaving in darkness as it proceeded the still chaotic mass from which it was detached,"—we recognise how hopelessly ignorant he is of the conceptions of modern science as to light. We demand what intellectual right he has to criticise, what he describes as the vain and boastful theories of modern thought. We cry: 'Understand, go into the school and learn, before you come onto the market-place and talk.' Mr. Gladstone, in his recent article in the *Nineteenth Century*, writes also, that: "We do not hear the authority of Scripture impeached on the ground that it assigns to the Almighty eyes and ears, hands, arms, and feet; nay, even the emotions of the human being." Now, these are precisely the strongest arguments which freethinkers at present use against scripture, and which many great philosophers have used in the past: "The understanding, will and intelligence, ascribed to God," says Spinoza, "can have no more in common with our human faculties than the Dog a sign in the heavens has with the barking animal we call a dog on earth." Is Mr. Gladstone ignorant alike of past and present? Those of you who wish to study enthusiasm of the market-place should read his article, notably the last two pages, wherein he tilts, like Don Quixote at the windmill, at the scientific doctrine of evolution. The language is magnificent, the rhetoric is unsurpassed, only there is an utter absence of logical thought, of the spirit of scholarly investigation. If our political leaders make such statements, what shall we say of them? Are they intellectually inferior men, or are they intellectually dishonest? Let us content ourselves by describing them as men of the market-place.

Such enthusiasm as we have described—an enthusiasm in the sense of the Cambridge theologian—based upon prejudice not upon reason, is an impossibility for the man of the study. If this is all enthusiasm means, then the ideal freethinker must be without it. But is there nothing which can take its place? Nothing which can be termed enthusiasm of the study? We think there is, although as its strength lies in calmness not in fanaticism, in persistence rather than petulance, it is not easy to make it manifest to those who have not experienced it as a motive power in action.

The enthusiasm of which I speak springs from the desire of knowledge. You cannot deny the existence of this desire, amounting in many cases to an absolute passion. Men have sacrificed everything, even their life, in the pursuit of truth. Nor was the spirit which moved all ambition, for many neither sought nor knew anything of fame. Granting that knowledge plays a great part in the struggle

cultivate in ourselves the persistent enthusiasm of the study; to endeavour by every means in our power to assist the education of others who have not the like means of intellectual development; to insist that moral problems shall be solved not on the basis of customary morality or individual prejudice, but solely by a thorough investigation of physical and social law; to repress so far as lies in our power those men of the market-place, who render our political life an apotheosis of ignorance, not a field for the display of a nation's wisdom; to recollect that inspiration and blind will, the prophet and the martyr, are not wanted in this our nineteenth century, they belong to the past. Should a man cry out that he has discovered a great truth, to listen to no emotional appeal, but demand the rational grounds of his faith, however great be his name or respected his authority. To refuse belief to an opinion, although it be held by the many, until we find a rational basis for its existence. Shortly, to consider all things, which are not based on the firm ground of reason subject to the sacred right of doubt; to treat all mere belief as delusion, and to reckon the unknown not as a field for dogma, but as a problem to be solved. To act thus and think thus, surely is to allow the doctrines of freethought to influence our practical conduct! To convert the market-place into the study! And if his life be spent in only struggling towards these ideals, in the long task of learning how to live, may we not at least place as an epitaph over our freethinker, Robert Browning's lines to the old Humanist who perished before he had satisfied his craving for knowledge:—

> Did not he magnify the mind, show clear
> Just what it all meant?
> He would not discount life, as fools do here,
> Paid by instalment.
> * * * * *
> That low man seeks a little thing to do,
> Sees it and does it:
> This high man, with a great thing to pursue,
> Dies ere he knows it.

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