

Ethical Nihilism. Looking at the subject from Mr. Spencer's point of view, we fail to see why one human tendency is to be deemed higher than another, or the set of men in whom a particular tendency prevails to be called better than those who obey its opposite. Superior strength is the only ground of preference which to us is distinctly visible. That morality is the law imposed by the strong upon the weak,—the law of the "upper dog," to use Dr. Denslow's homely phrase, is a doctrine by no means new. It was preached with equal plainness by the Sophists amidst the general dissolution of public morals which attended the frenzied strife of faction in Greece at the time of the Peloponnesian war, and was met by Socrates and Plato with a moral idealism founded on belief in a Deity. It is a little startling to find at the end of Dr. Denslow's volume an essay in which he vehemently and almost fiercely defends large fortunes and their possessors against what he supposes to be the communistic teachings of the Gospel. He charges the founder of Christianity with leaving us only "a weak basis on which to resist the class of *crimes* which, like forgery, robbery, larceny and burglary, and certain phases of social vice, take from the rich to give to the poor." The phrase which we have marked with italics seems scarcely consistent with the theory that moral law is merely the law of the upper dog. Dr. Denslow is particularly offended by the saying about the Lilies of the Field, which he denounces as scientifically false, inasmuch as botanists know that lilies do spin, and economically vicious, because it incites to idleness and beggary. We venture to think that we could prove to him that the Gospel rightly read enjoins not idleness, but honest industry, which, combined with general morality, is sure to produce wealth; though the Bible bids you when riches increase not to set your heart upon them, a precept which some of the greatest captains of industry have obeyed without any sort of detriment to their efficiency as servants of civilization. A begging friar can hardly plead the example of Paul, who, while he was preaching the Gospel, maintained himself by the labour of his own hands.