

"CHRISTIANITY AND HERBERT-SPENCER NOT IRRECONCILABLE."

The craving for Liberty is perhaps the strongest passion of humanity. The purely natural man, conscious as yet only of his animal powers, feels an irresistible energy within him impelling him to their exercise. Restraint is unbearable. He will break all material bonds, or—he will die in the effort. Liberty is Heaven's first law—freedom to exercise the faculties which Heaven has bestowed. From this root grow all social relationships, all nationalities, all governments among mankind. Already in the present, we can dimly descry its consummation in the future, in a liberty which shall be simply "perfect obedience to perfect law." Thus, to say that "Liberty is Heaven's first law" is only to put in other words the truism that "order is Heaven's first law."

The most perfect realization of this in the present condition of the world is to be found in the higher order of animals—not, alas! as yet, among men. Instinct has not yet indeed attained its highest development—its sublimest perfection—but it is so near it that *we* at least can hardly detect a flaw. Creation is marred, and marred alone, by man; and as man permits more of the influx of the Divine, by voluntarily conjoining his will to the Divine will, it becomes possible for higher degrees of life to flow with every form of creation, mineral, vegetable and animal.

Recognizing this as "social statics"—the fixed law by which all mankind and social advancement can alone be truly and permanently attained—permit me to draw attention to some of the conclusions reached by Herbert Spencer in his work entitled "Social Statics." Herbert Spencer leaves the Divine Life altogether out of the question, as a practical issue at least, yet on the merely natural plane comes wonderfully near the truth as taught in the Divine Word. Indirectly, as we proceed, the reasons for this may possibly become very apparent.

According to Herbert Spencer, man has an inalienable "right to exercise all his faculties so long as he does not interfere with the like liberty in others." Now this is but the natural plane, of which the spiritual is, "as ye would that a man should do unto you do ye even so to them." In our author's axiom it is a matter of *right* on both sides. In that of our Lord it is the matter of *doing* right, the will to do justly—that is called into exercise. The celestial is found in the second of our Lord's two commandments—"thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself"—which is only possible when a man has begun to love the derived goodness and truth he recognizes as his neighbour wherever found, because it is something of God—a something of His divine effluent life.

Starting however from the natural plane of freedom to exercise the faculties, Herbert Spencer divides this right into "the right to life and personal liberty, the right to the use of the earth, the right of property of all kinds, under which he does not omit to include the right of property in ideas and in character—the right to exchange commodities, *i.e.*, *Free Trade*—the right of free speech, the rights of women, and the rights of children, concluding thus: "As elsewhere pointed out, there must necessarily exist incongruity between this perfect law and the imperfect man, and if evils are entailed upon a people by immediate and entire recognition of this law of equal freedom in the matter of the speech as well as in that of action, such evils are merely significant of the incomplete adaptation of that people to the social state, and not of any defect in the law of equal freedom."

From this first principle of his, however, our author deduces the utmost freedom of action, not only for man but for *all* human beings—women and children as well as men—and maintains this position with arguments, which seem incontestable; for if we grant his first position as regards men, we perforce must admit that women and children have also faculties—differing it may be in degree or kind—yet the fact of such difference, if it does exist—and it is questioned by some—does not touch the argument that they have still an equal right to exercise *those they have*, under the same wise limitation with regard to an equal right in others.

Now this is to Herbert Spencer the only true basis of society and social progress. He asserts that the more complete the degree of liberty the more possible—nay, certain—becomes a higher development of life. What life is he does not, in this connection at least, proceed to define. *We* Christians know that life is simply love. Freedom to love—liberty to develop the affections—is the liberty to which we are called. The more we let our love flow out to others, the more access of life is given to others, and to ourselves. Viewed as regards the body politic, we perceive that the kind of social system which is built on charity, thus defined, is—must be—just exactly the opposite of that which has malice towards all others except self, as *its* foundation stone. The difference between a government that seeks its own power, or praise, or place, and a governing power which simply wishes to make itself useful to the community, becomes very marked as it filters out into such rights as personal liberty, the use of the soil, the right to property, the right to exchange commodities (*i.e.* trade), the right of freedom of speech, and last, but not least certainly, *these* and other rights for women and children. In the one case it recognizes only the principle that *might is right*—that to the victor by power or skill or smooth-tongued duplicity, belong the spoils—so long as he can hold them. That the principle of action produces a long series of crimes (more or less heinous according to its intensity) against the God of the commonwealth. Or, its selfishness may take a wider range, and identifying the community with itself, seek to benefit *it* at the expense of other nations. From this cause spring wars and rumours of wars, retaliatory tariffs, and contemptible trickery and fraud in the construction of international treaties. It is a positive law of the realm of Politics that in proportion to the tincture of fraud which colours a people, just so far do their representative men adorn themselves with a colouring of deceit in their dealings with other nations; so that a nation's quality may be readily discerned by a careful study of their laws, their treaty obligations, and their manner of carrying out both. The reason of this is to be found in the Social bondage to which the people subject themselves—not necessarily a bondage to law so called, but to public opinion (which is a more dignified name than mob-law). This bondage consists in the fear of each lest another should in any wise gain any advantage over him, which he might possibly himself secure, if "smart" enough to do so. To be thus incapable of trust is to be also incap-

ble of receiving or giving out affection, and thus to be deprived of anything but a mockery and perversion of true life—to live a kind of dreary burlesque of social life.

When, however, even an important minority of the nation have received enough of the divine life to view usefulness to others as the aim of existence, it has simply a marvellous leavening power. The influence is felt even by those bitterly opposed to it. It is to them a mysterious power which seems ever to expose them to scrutiny, and thus keeps them in check, impelling them in self-defence to more or less of usefulness, and *semblance*, at least, of honesty of purpose. The power *we* can exercise in this way is hardly more than a thousandth part recognised by any of us, or you and I would use it more. It is easily acquired. All that is needed is that we should lose all thought of self, and permit this higher life—this life from above—to live *in us*, to *will* and *think* and *do* by means of our life. The first step seems, perhaps, so little a thing as to be hardly worth doing—only, perhaps, our one vote, given in secret in that ballot-box which the remains of tyrannical, unjust power has seemed to some to render a necessity, or at least expedient as a means to foster the growth of honest expression of opinion. But, though slight in itself, this one vote may open the way, if we give it, to greater things. It may necessitate a struggle within ourselves, too, when we think of the apparent meanness of voting in the dark dead against a man, perhaps, who has done us some favour in the past. Yet *do* it, if it be right, and *don't* conceal it. Wider opportunity will be given each of us if we are fit for it; and no man knows when he begins to act according to the light that is given to him, what new *floods* of light will be gradually let in upon him, nor dreams what a weight of influence for good may yet be exercised through him. Just think of it for a moment. Imagine a nation voting individually each one for the best man, the man who will be most useful, of the two or three or four placed before him for choice—voting thus, free entirely from party prejudice or any selfish motive, judging only for the good of his fellows, without a thought of self. Dare a dishonest man place himself before such a constituency? He would hardly even once make the attempt. He certainly would not repeat it. It is thus that from society generally must come the cure of political evils—the narrowness, the self-hood of human laws.

Now if we leave causes and reason from effects as manifested to us in the life of our Lord when He dwelt on earth—God-man among men—we find no grave difference in the social state to which Herbert Spencer points the finger of hope, and the outward or physical acts (if with reverence we may dare to call them so) of our Lord. The difference is one of *degree*, not of *kind*. God manifest in the flesh was infinite lovingkindness. Herbert Spencer's ideal was only finite. Yet it is a finite lovingkindness he aims at—a universal brotherly love. His ideal is marred always more or less by question of mutual rights, so that self-hood is never *wholly* lost sight of. Contrast such an *ideal* with the *reality* of the Divine Humanity. Illustrations are familiar to you all, the marriage feast at Cana of Galilee; the raising from physical death of the son of the widow of Nain—the curing of the sick from bodily ailments, notably the impotent man at the Pool of Bethesda—the opening of the eyes of the blind man performed by the touch of our Lord's own gentle hand—the convincing yet scathing rebuke to the Scribes and Pharisees, who brought to Him the woman taken in adultery, and the love which breathed in His one word of what would seem almost advice, more than command, "Go and sin no more"—and then that touching scene of almost fraternal sympathy when at the grave of Lazarus "Jesus wept." Truly He suffers with us when we are afflicted. In each and all of His deeds the Divine Love itself seems to breathe upon our most external feelings and emotions; and more than all, that love is given forth freely, asking for nothing again, but leaving the recipient of His goodness free to return evil for good if he will; making no conditions *before* the benefit is bestowed, but trusting us freely, and thereby drawing from us, if indeed it be within us, the true nobility of an answering love. If *we* do likewise in His strength—loose all restraint save the fetters which answering love may form—the result is Liberty, perfect liberty—because the will itself is united thereby to the Divine will.

Note the practical effects of such a course. Shall it not bring refinement? for is not refinement only true and constant consideration for others—that true politeness which has its seat in the heart? Men would thus by loving their fellow-man, and doing them only good, leave them in freedom from all outward restraint to return hatred for love if they will, choosing rather themselves to suffer than to cause suffering, to give up something of physical freedom, rather than to enforce physical slavery—choosing rather to retain spiritual freedom, the freedom of the inner man in will and thought, than to preserve from harm the outward man by enforcing that will on others. This *does* necessitate the sacrifice of any personal freedom demanded of us by others, so long as they permit us to call our inner selves our own, and do not encroach on the realm of spirit through the realm of matter. If they *do* attempt this, and carry it to extremes, we must loose our hold on the material altogether, and "fear not them who kill the body."

Will not such a spirit form men prepared to yield the foremost place, the fullest power to others to exercise their will in things material, seeking only to rule them by the spiritual forces of love and wisdom acting in and through affection and reason, thus forming themselves into channels for the influx of Life and Light to the true man—the inner nature of their fellows never even attempting to control their actions by opposing material forces to material force. Is not this, when brought down thus to the not natural plane, something very like Herbert Spencer's theory of freedom to each and all to exercise their faculties, so long as they do not interfere with the like liberty in others—only with this difference, that it trusts to spiritual liberty in things material. This principle carried out—and shall it not be carried out by Christians? gives the fullest liberty to all. It even gives place to evil, hoping and striving to overcome evil with good. In society it gives place to the forward, the arrogant, the self-conceited, and permits them to shine as best they may—to arrogate power—to inflate themselves and bask in the lurid light of their own self-sufficiency—merely turning upon them the light of a higher and holier forgetfulness of self, in acknowledging, not necessarily always in words, but in spirit, and shining out therefore in the whole outward aspect, that what is *in us* is not *us* but *ours*.

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