

## THE VINE AND ITS CLUSTERS.

BY REV. JOHN MAY, M.A.

UNIVERSAL space is a boundless sea, dotted with archipelagoes; each archipelago crowded with islands of light. These celestial clusters seem to be innumerable, spreading out into space utterly beyond the reach of thought,—even the blank intervening spaces transcending measurement, and almost outstripping human imagination. In a word, the universe is as one great Vine hung with rich clusters of worlds, or rather systems of worlds. The Earth is a grain of dust in one of these clusters. "The Milky Way, which nightly as a circling zone thou seest powdered with stars." Could you get astride a ray of light, and travel out in a straight line at the rate of 186,000 miles per second for several thousands of years—off out into the open sea of blue where no islands are, and thence look back to your starting point, what would your eyes behold? What would the starry heavens, on which your childhood had gazed so oft in wonder, have shrunk to? A patch of white cloud not bigger than a man's hand! The whole visible sphere of diamonded blue, contracted to a fleck of foam on the silent sea; whilst around, above, beneath, ahead, similar patches, now utterly beyond the touch of the most powerful telescope, break in endless succession on the astonished vision,—new heavens, fresh universes every one of them, without number and without end! Imagine the surface of the Atlantic ocean flecked all over with foam-patches a few yards asunder,—faint, inadequate image of the universe which surrounds us. The heavens you see are just one of these patches, or nebulae; outnumbering the leaves of the forest or the sands of the seashore. Only one little patch amid untold billions. "A little patch," did I say? Let us see. Look at the Milky Way, that wide irregular ribbon of stellar clouds floating across the winter sky. What is this vast expanded arch but our little patch of foam on the great ocean, viewed edgewise? that mighty lens of stars and systems, of which our Sun with his little family of planets is one factor, and in which our Earth is but a pebble! The whole of the Milky Way is included in our little fleck of foam; and yet, so long a Way is it that it would take a ray of light, travelling 186,000 miles per second, 15,000 years to traverse it from end to end!

Such is one only of the clusters on the Great Vine of the Universe. Thought faints and reels beneath the stupendous spectacle. All she can do is, to ask: How did it all come there? Was it made? Or, did it grow? If made, Who made it? If it grew, then from what seed? and out of what soil? for it all seems to rest on nothing at all. These are questions which have always vexed the little minds of men, and will vex some of them to the end. To one mind, behind it all is visible a Being who made it and hung it where it is. To another mind it simply grew. Out of the primal "fire-mist" it evolved itself, taking form and movement. But, whence the fire-mist,

and what supported it, he cannot tell. Well, you have seen a vine grow; but you never saw a vine grow whose roots were not *in the ground*. From what soil springs the Great Vine of the Universe? Given the soil, we might perhaps grant the evolution: but what or where is the soil? The roots must be grounded in something. Tell me *what* that something is, and then go on with your evolution. The theory of evolution, as a solution of the mystery, is simply a failure until it shows from what soil the Vine sprung, and what ground supports it. I am willing to go back to the "fire-mist," and to grant that there *was* such a thing, though nobody *knows* that there was; but my questionings are then as far as ever from satisfaction. Whence came this "fire-mist"? What set it in motion? Ultimately it is a question of the priority of mind or of matter. We know that matter exists. Which is the more supposable—that mind existed first and produced matter? or, that matter existed first and produced mind? That evolution is written all over the universe is manifest: that it can displace the Creator, or dispense with an antecedent energy out of which all that is visible has sprung, can never be shown. From the tiny seed in the soil to the rich, ripe grape clusters, I grant the evolution; but, how about the seed itself and the soil? Where would the Vine be without the seed, the soil, the sun and the rain? I await an answer. Meantime who shall gainsay me if I find a soil for myself, and call it God? Who shall cavil if I choose to regard this marvellous universe, once pure, blank extension, now crowded with visible objects of glory and beauty, as simply the power of God made visible? Until science has settled the question, what principle of logic or canon of philosophy forbids me to suppose that once upon a time, through the fiat of mind, the "Vast Inane," pellucid and speckless, on a sudden flashed forth seas of "mist," the primal material and elements of all things? that the same creative energy set these in motion, and so began a mighty process of evolution issuing in what we see? and that the same creative energy pervades, sustains, and is the life of all;—visible in the falling stone, the blooming cheek, the opening flower, as in the ever-blazing sun or the mystic movements of the spheres? Who shall refute me if I choose to recognise in the magnetic force, the power of gravitation, the electric current, as in the life of plant or animal, simply the continued presence in action of the original cause of all things,—the pulsations of the great heart of Him Who is the Lord, and the "Giver of Life?" the soil in which the vine is rooted, and the sustenance by which it lives?

Had Archimedes but had a fulcrum for his lever, doubtless he could have overturned the world; and had the evolutionist but a bit of ground whence might spring the vine of the universe, his theory would be complete. The lack of it is simply fatal.

—God does not reveal truth and duty to careless minds, and send his helping grace to idle hands.

## GLORIFICATION OF BRUTALITY.

IT is all very well for certain papers to condemn in leading articles the prize ring, with its belongings and supporters. That is an easy and costless task. If the conductors of the press would refuse to notice prize fights, save by an obscure, brief, and indignant paragraph of a few lines, they would show their sincerity in a most effective manner. But when we see our daily papers giving more space to the details of a brutal attack made by two ruffians upon each other, than they give to a prolonged debate in Parliament, we question much whether this glorification of brutality by the press indicates that the conductors are much more civilised at the core than the barbarians to whom they give such prominence. It is a terrible commentary on the boasted enlightenment of these times to have a whole continent compelled to participate in some form in the revolting barbarity the press has made so much of, as though a fight between two brutes were of universal interest! As a matter of fact hundreds of thousands of homes were desecrated, and insulted by the morning papers flinging such filth into the family circle as the prize fight reports contained.

We boast of progress,—there is a progress towards evil as well as good. *The Press for over thirty years has been making progress downwards in decency.* We remember well when no newspapers reported such events except one or two of the baser class of so-called "sporting" papers, whose conductors catered for the support of gamblers, the betting fraternity, dissipated idlers, and the riff-raff of society generally. *Judging by the daily papers of to-day these classes control to a large extent the news department of the Press.* The honorable stand taken by the secular papers against pandering to the brutal tastes of the basest classes was broken through by the *Times* some thirty-three or so years ago. Since then the secular papers have given up column upon column to the glorification of bestiality.

We doubt much whether we have not more persons on this continent to-day who are utterly brutish in tastes, than ever witnessed the gladiatorial combats in heathen Rome, persons who are as savage, as coarse, as blood-thirsty, as any pagans to whom we are sending missionaries.

It is high time that prize fighters, and all who help them by any form of sympathy, press managers and editors included who give up column after column to glorify these brutes, were made to realize that degrading sports of this class are properly punishable by the criminal law.

Were such men as Sullivan, Kilrain, and Mitchell, and all that tribe, with a batch of Press conductors, who keep these brutes so prominently before the public, sent to a common jail for a few months, it would help to justify our boast of 19th century progress, would clear the honor of the Press, and do civilisation a very great service.

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