

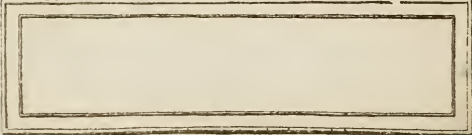
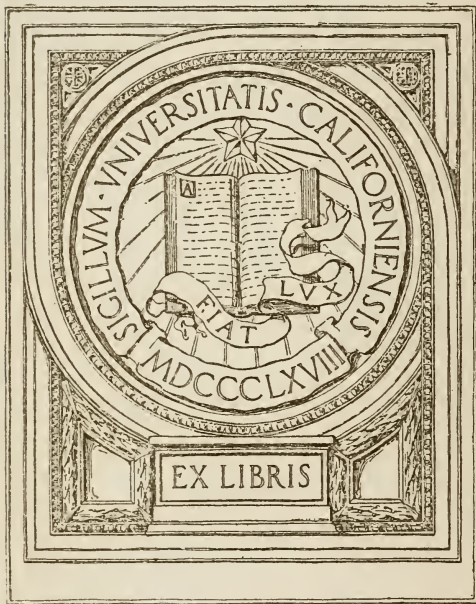
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IN MEMORIAM  
Mrs. Phoebe A. Hearst



# The False Philosophy

## In Mr. Markham's Poem.

God's in his heaven—All's right with the world."

—*Robert Browning.*

A SERMON BY  
REV. E. F. DINSMORE,  
MINISTER OF UNITY CHURCH,  
SANTA BARBARA, CALIF.



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TO THE  
ANNUAL

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# THE FALSE PHILOSOPHY

IN MR. MARKHAM'S POEM.

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Early in January, 1899, there was published in a San Francisco paper a poem which, according to the author, presents thoughts awakened in his mind through looking upon a picture of a French peasant leaning upon the handle of his rude hoe, as he stands in the field. The charm of the Millet paintings I understand to be the rare coloring of the back-ground of sky, over whose beauty connoisseurs rejoice, but the writer of the poem seems to have noticed only the rude figure in the fore-ground, which is possibly owing to the fact that, before he saw the painting, with its glory of color, he had seen a cheap newspaper print, which represented only the uncouth shape of the man's figure. It interests me to discover that the poem was not struck off at the white-heat of indignation, but was brooded in the author's mind for fourteen years, and finished when the time was ripe for its production. A recently printed copy of a page from the note book of Mr. Edwin Markham, the author of

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the poem, indicates how he toiled not only for words, but for thoughts, and is fatal to any claim that his message was "inspired."

During all the years between the birth of the purpose to write the poem and its presentation, in fitting language, to public notice, the author tells us that the rude print of the grewsome figure had place upon his wall, as inspiring a companion as the sombre raven of Poe's poem, with "its shadow on the floor," in which his soul lay. Now there is, to my mind, a very clear intimation of the relation between cause and effect in the statement of the Poet that for fourteen years the wall of his room held such an artistic nightmare as a cheap newspaper cut, in black and white, of Millet's painting, and the production of his lines: the mind which dwells upon monstrosities and feeds upon the uncouth, might reasonably expect to present humanity in such a distorted view.

My objection to the poem is that it is both insincere and false, in that its philosophy is not in harmony with the convictions of its author, while as a picture of mankind it is untrue to fact. If you are a deluded victim of that easy-going optimism which fancies that there is an Omnipotent power who will reverse a law of nature in order to protect man from the consequences of his own folly, it may be worth while for you to hang pictures suggestive of the inevitable law of degeneration upon your walls, but the average man, who recognizes his responsibilities as a product of life, will find that his dreams are sweeter and his visions



more wholesome if he realizes that in Nature's great workshop there are many ideals still unfinished, and that incompleteness does not imply lack of progress.

We do not judge Markham's poem by the page from his note book. The very fact that humanity has an ideal for man so much higher than Millet's peasant, shows what is being wrought in the way of human development. When the ideal is high degeneration is not probable. The author of the poem places in contrast with the picture that verse in Genesis which asserts that "God created man in his own image," and his contention is that the perfect handiwork of Edenic man has been marred and degraded. Herein he is insincere, for Mr. Markham is not an Orthodox believer: he knows that the formative period of the human race was characterized by savagery. He knows that when he calls the peasant "a brother to the ox," that the distance between them is immeasurable, man, Millet's man, standing infinitely above the brute beast whose master he is. When he says, "who loosened and let down this jaw," he knows that the firmer jaw of his predecessors belonged to a lower state and crunched bones. He knows that "that slanted brow" holds a brighter "light within this brain" than flickered within the low front of his more, not less, brutal ancestors.

To the query

"Is this the Thing the Lord God made and gave  
To have dominion over sea and land?"

the answer is that the Poet is giving to an ancient fable the dignity and authority of fact; that from false premises a true conclusion is not to be deduced; and that the Poet knows imperfect man to be humanity in process of formation, and not of degeneration.

True, there are "gulfs between him and the seraphim," but the student of humanity can name many who have well nigh bridged these gulfs, and the Peasant is nearer to the seraphic heights than to the slimy depths from which he came. The Poem is false because it ignores the steady progress of mankind, that Millet's peasant is more of a man than his feudal kin.

Beside the picture I would place not a mythical Adam, but the portrait of the man who painted it, whose brush made him so famous that such a sketch brought \$60,000, who was himself a Norman peasant, himself the son of a man with a hoe. If the Peasant can, in a single generation, produce a Millet, then is he nearer akin to the seraph than the ox; a step in an *ascending* scale. When the brief compass of a single life is long enough to transform a French peasant into a French president, it is worth while to consider whether social conditions are not developing quite as rapidly as is good for the race, and whether the spirit of appreciation is not more reasonable and healthful than the spirit which snarls and condemns. It is the use of what we have, rather than fault-finding and censure, which brings larger opportunities, and the

question for each man to consider is as to how far he is improving the opportunities given him, not whether that opportunity is as large as his neighbor's; not whether you are gaining 5 pounds or 2 pounds, but are you making the most of what you have; are you using your hoe, or leaning upon it, and whining because you are not entrusted with a gang-plow? The size of your opportunity is probably the size of your ability, and instead of coveting what you wouldn't know how to employ, get vigorously to work and so improve the opportunity you have as to develop an ability which will bring you larger opportunities. Most employees think they could run the business better than the head of the firm; some are spurred thereby to exertion, and ascend, others to envy, and descend. Too many want the government to put them in charge of a gang-plow who do not know how to use the hoe. A conspicuous failure ought not to be clamoring for a larger job.

How much more sane than the spirit of Markham's poem and how much truer to fact, is the thought in the following lines by E. P. Powell, author of "Our Heredity from God:"

"Lifted by toil of centuries, he leans  
Upon his hoe, and gazes upon the heavens;  
The original light of ages on his face.  
Who made him rise above the earth of fate,  
A man who grieves but conquors grief with hope?  
Who loosed his tongue to speak articulate?  
Whose was the hand that fronted up his brow?  
Who kindled Truth's red torch within his brain?"

Behold the man that God doth make; and give  
To have dominion over sea and land !  
To trace the stars; and search the earth for power:  
To make the seasons fertile to his will !  
This is the dream He dreamed who shaped the suns,  
And painted blue the firmament with light.  
Through all the stretch of heaven, to its last throne,  
There is no shape more glorious than his;  
More eloquent of hate for sensual greed;  
More 'lumined for the future's high demand.

What gulfs between him and the anthropoid;  
Master of ox or plow ! Behold for him  
Shall yet speak Plato ! of his loins the Christ !  
Unless for him, the dawns would rift in vain,  
Or roses redden into thought;—and the hills  
Would hold their powers inarticulate.  
Here is the upward looker ! Slowly rising up,—  
Yet master of the earth, he turns the glebe,  
And reaps rich harvest where the beast would starve."

With all my heart I believe in that healthy discontent which is born of ideals and aspirations of the loftiest character, but the spirit which dominates much of the clamor for social reform of our day is the spirit of malevolent envy, which masquerades as Socialism, but which every true Socialist recognizes as fatal to his theories. Ideals, which make us dissatisfied with less than the highest attainments, bless and stimulate any life, but when you implant envy in any heart you have sowed the seeds of bitterness which will make that

[AUTHOR'S NOTE.—Mr. Powell's lines, which he suggests as an "amendment" to Markham's interpretation of Millet's picture, were not included in the sermon as originally written, being found in "The Literary Digest" a few days later.]

life unwholesome and unhappy.

There is a spiteful spirit abroad, which is but envy because others are able to be that which we would fain become: it is the envy of those who have not which feeds the arrogance of those who have. He who parades his wealth would take no pleasure therein if he did not know that others envied him. No man struts when he is alone. A millionaire starving for bread with others in mid-Africa, would find no satisfaction in displaying his diamonds for no one would covet them. The vulgar exhibitions of wealth show the ambitions of those raised suddenly from a condition of want. The Bradley-Martins flaunt their wealth because it enables them to purchase the envy of those who court the opportunity for precisely such display. Denunciations of the rich are uttered by those who are no whit better in spirit than the ones they denounce. What we are, not what we possess, makes us mean, whether we be millionaires or mendicants. The only support of an Aristocracy is the attitude of the class which craves recognition from them or hopes to become aristocrats like them, and the weakest part of Markham's poem is where he seeks to arouse resentment against those whom he terms "Masters, lords and rulers," for Kings, Noblemen, Politicians, Bosses are such because *the people* will that they should be such. I am weary of this denunciation of individuals who are merely the product of conditions which the people have made. Do you suppose that Mr. Joseph Chamberlain made himself the autocrat he is and developed a policy,

resulting in a war which nobody but himself, wanted? Do you fancy that the unutterable infamy of the French Army officers is opposed by the French people? Do you suppose the politicians of this land dare make base propositions to the people, but for the existence of base passions to which they appeal? Let us have done with this shifting of responsibility from our own shoulders, and this talk about "Masters, lords and rulers," when these cannot exist save through conditions which the people are themselves responsible for. With gleeful gladness has this poem been hailed by those who hurl their denunciations against the products of conditions for which themselves are responsible, and which they have fostered with as distinctly selfish designs and desires as are possessed by those against whom they declaim: the others have succeeded, they have failed; but both have been actuated by the same motives. After every election you can hear defeated candidates denouncing their successful competitors for the use of methods which they had themselves employed. After every speculative crisis in Wall Street you will hear men, who have been ruined, denouncing those who used the very methods whereby they had themselves sought to ruin others.

How many reform leaders have the last half century produced who showed themselves willing to suffer the defeat of personal ambition, that "the cause" might prosper? Every cause splits into factions in the struggle of individuals for supremacy.

The very class which rejoices over the threat in Markham's lines is less capable of self-control than the class against which it is aimed.

All this contention over unequal conditions is founded upon a false philosophy of life which any intelligent study of nature's pages condemns. What the world needs is quality, not *c*-quality, and the former will never be obtained where the latter prevails. With our utterly false standards of success we talk about unequal social conditions, but a merely superficial study of what human lives have written during this century, in these United States alone, will show that out of what we term unfavorable conditions have come the highest achievements; and that utter failure has been produced with the most favorable conditions, as men judge them. If the formation of noble character, if the development of lofty manhood, is the true purpose of our lives and the real test of success, then we *know* that what we term hard conditions have been most helpful, in spite of which knowledge, and in the face of nature's warnings, we seek for ourselves and our offspring conditions which are full of danger, and have produced evil results. The uncouth peasant, leaning upon his hoe, in the midst of honest toil, is vastly more of a man, and contains more promise for the future, than the most faultlessly attired dude, leaning on his cane and ogling passing women from the front of a cigar stand; and yet there are women who would resent the honest glance of admiration from the toiling peasant, who

invite the glances of the loafer whose attention is an insult to honest womanhood. Conditions which add a worker to the ranks of humanity, are vastly better than those which add an idler.

There are signs of the times which bode ill for the future because narrow and superficial views are being accepted by shallow minds, which delight in sensational appeals rather than philosophical affirmations, and will not learn from experience. The whole sentiment of Markham's poem shows the folly of looking at the world through a pin-hole: it is as sensible as it would be to judge almost any city by the part through which you pass on the rail-road, or to mourn over the building of rail-roads because they throw so many stage-drivers out of their jobs. These shallow minds are easily aroused by those who would rather stir up hatred than tell the truth; rather create antagonisms than cure evils: yet all true reforms must be founded upon the best emotions of the human heart.

The scarcely veiled threat in Markham's poem is unworthy a man acquainted with evolutionary law—how much saner are these verses in their recognition of growth by law rather than lawlessness:

#### WHAT A FLOWER SAID TO A SOCIALIST.

Hast thou seen a flower's unfolding ?  
Marked a bud's evolving strife ?  
From the inward to the outward  
Bursting into wider life.

Then if thou canst read the symbols  
God has scattered through his earth,



Thou wilt see how man develops  
Moving on from birth to birth.  
First the outer leaves are loosened,  
And the inner open last;  
Half the petals may have freedom  
While the rest are fettered fast.  
So in human evolution,  
Kings and lords have freedom gained,  
Followed by the middle classes,  
While the workers are enchained.  
Newest life is in the center  
Of the half-unfolded flower,  
And the outer leaves first wither,  
Losing shapeliness and power.  
So the heart of all is Labor—  
There the fullest life is found,  
Prophesying growth and freedom  
To the frailest petal bound.  
Not upon the outer petals  
Must the inner ones depend;  
But upon their own endeavor;  
Labor is its own best friend.  
Thus each rosebud is a token  
That our triumph is at hand,  
When the Life-power shall have broken  
Every tyrannizing band.  
Roses are not rosebuds ruined;  
Change brings hope, not fear and awe;  
From inward evermore to outward  
Is the universal law.

—*Herbert N. Casson,*  
*of the Lynn Labor Church*

Rev. Dr. Henry Van Dyke has recently published in "The Outlook" some "Guide-posts in the Pathway to Peace," and the finest among them is

the one which suggests that we should be governed, influenced, swayed by the consideration of what we can find to admire rather than by that which awakens our disgust: a royal thought. I would like to join an Optimistic Club of persons who should meet and tell one another of the signs of promise, the evidences of progress. California holds many disappointed people to whom the success of others is gall and wormwood, and they breed a pessimistic atmosphere which poisons the blood of all of us who do not get out into the glorious sunshine and breathe deeply: but gratitude is more inspiring than groans. Find the admirable, the hopeful, the promising things, and let them govern your life rather than the things which tend to despair; have solid ground for your faith in the future.

My last thought is that only a false philosophy must appeal to the baser passions of mankind for the purpose of advancing the interests of humanity: with all that the world holds of pain and woe it is not a lost or ruined world, and the progress of the world during this century justifies the largest measure of hopeful anticipation for the future.

Nothing is more fatal than for the advocates of reform to chill their followers hearts with despair, or fill them with unholy desires, or unworthy motives; and in contrast with Markham's poem, with its falseness, place this verse by a woman of strong socialistic convictions:

“Listen not to the word that would have you believe  
That the voice of the age is a moan—

That the red hand of wrong is victorious and strong,  
And that wrong is triumphant alone:  
There was never a time on the face of the earth  
When love was so near to its own."

—*Charlotte Perkins Stetson.*





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