



Mark Twain's Philosophy.

Mark Twain's posthumous book, which has just been published by the Rationalist Press Association, is exciting considerable controversy. The book, which takes the form of a dialogue between a young man and an old one, is really an attempt to establish the truth of the following passage—taken from its pages:—

We (mankind) he writes, have ticketed ourselves with a number of qualities to which we have given misleading names Love, Hate, Charity, Compassion, Avarice, Benevolence, and so on. I mean we attach misleading meanings to the names. They are all forms of self-contentment, self-gratification, but the names so disguise them that they distract our attention from the fact. Also we have smuggled a word into the dictionary which ought not to be there at all—Self-sacrifice. It describes a thing which does not exist. But, worst of all, we ignore and never mention the Sole Impulse which dictates and compels a man's every act—the imperious necessity of securing his own approval, in every emergency and at all costs.

Mark Twain cites many instances with a view to persuading his readers of the truth of his doctrine. Why does a mother sacrifice herself for her child? Simply because she is so constituted that she finds more happiness in promoting the happiness of her child than in neglecting to do so. She is gratifying her maternal instincts. She would not make the same sacrifice for another woman's child. Why? Because she would not find the same satisfaction in doing so. Every human being, according to Mark Twain, acts from selfish motives. The difference between the man we call good and the man we call bad is not that the one is unselfish and the other selfish. They are both selfish. The difference is that, while the selfishness of the good man takes the form of promoting the happiness of others, the selfishness of the bad man has generally an opposite effect.

The View of Blatchford.

Mr. Robert Blatchford, who, in his book entitled "The Bottom Dog," embraces the fundamental principles of determinism, has written an interesting criticism of Mark Twain's book in an English newspaper. Mr.

has written an interesting criticism of Mark Twain's book in an English newspaper. Mr. Blatchford agrees with the American humorist in holding that we are all the product of heredity and environment, and in denying the existence of—to use Hurley's expressive phrase—"the libertine called Free-will." But he boldly denies the doctrine of selfishness. He holds that the mother's love for her child is unselfish—inasmuch as her aim is, not the good of herself, but the good of her child, her motive is altruistic.

What's in a Name?

For my part, I think both the English Socialist and the American humorist are disputing about a mere name. There is really no difference between them. Both agree that the man who promotes the happiness of others is the man who ought to be encouraged. Both agree that the man who does his best to promote the misery of his fellow-creatures ought to be discouraged. Mark Twain says of the warm-hearted, loving man: "He is selfish, but his selfishness is of the kind that ought to be encouraged." Robert Blatchford says: "He is unselfish; he is an altruist, and we want more like him." Both agree in preferring the good man to the bad man; they only differ as to the words that ought to be employed to define goodness and badness. With Mark Twain goodness is a kind of selfishness; with Robert Blatchford selfishness is a kind of goodness. Theoretically they may differ, but when it comes to action—to choosing their friends, both act in exactly the same way, preferring, in spite of their theories, honest men to rogues, kind men to bores, lovers of truth to liars, and clean men to filthy. A man gives up his life for his fellows—dies, it may be, a martyr to truth and liberty. Both Mark

Twain and Robert Blatchford agree in holding that his action was the inevitable result of the forces that made him what he was. Mark Twain would add: "He was really gratifying his passion for liberty and truth—and was, in fact, having a good time, according to his idea of a good time." Robert Blatchford would add: "He was a noble martyr, in whose great heart glowed the pure and holy love of truth, liberty, and humanity." But were they really to see such a man facing such a martyr down with unfaltering brow, forgetting their philosophical differences, they would both bow before him in the dust, shedding the same tears of gratitude and love, and feeling themselves equally in the august presence of a spectacle before which even the stars in the heavens sink into insignificance. Goodness is the greatest thing in the universe, and its greatness is not altered by the name we may give it or deny it.

What is the Superman?

Holbrook Jackson, the biographer of George Bernard Shaw, contributes an enlightening article to "T.P.'s Monthly" on the notorious Superman of Nietzsche. Person-

lightening article to "T.P.'s Monthly" on the notorious superman of Nietzsche. Personally, I do not regard Nietzsche as a great philosopher. He is not of the order of Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, Hume, or Spencer. He can be more fittingly classed with men of the type of Schopenhauer, Emerson, Carlyle, or Ruskin—men who, while possessing great powers of thought, and greater power of expression, are too aggressively individualistic and personal to be really capable of calm philosophical thinking. Still, Nietzsche, by virtue of a sort of intellectual audacity, is very stimulating and suggestive, and some of his ideas have produced a profound impression on serious thinkers. Certainly his superman has taken its place among the general stock in trade of speculative philosophers. Before dealing with Mr. Jackson's view of the Superman let us hear what Nietzsche himself says about it. In "Thus Spake Zarathustra," he says:—

I teach you the Superman. Man is something that is to be surpassed. What have ye done to surpass man?

All beings hitherto have created something beyond themselves; and ye want to be the ebb of that great tide, and would rather go back to the beast than surpass man.

What is the ape to man? A laughing-stock, a thing of shame. And just the same shall man be to the Superman: a laughing-stock, a thing of shame.

Ye have made your way from worm to man, and much within you is still worm, and once were ye apes, and even now man is more an ape than many of the apes.

Even the wisest among you is only a disharmony, an hybrid of plant and phantom. But do I bid you become plants and phantoms?

Lo, I teach you the Superman!

Now, that is very excellent writing, but who would call it philosophy? Does it not lack the philosophic temper? Besides, does it not betray a certain confusion of thought unworthy of a philosopher? "All beings hitherto," says Nietzsche, "have created something beyond themselves"—except man. This, of course, refers to the evolutionary fact that man is the head of the animal kingdom. The lower animals have produced something beyond themselves—man has not. But had Nietzsche given the matter a little serious thought he would have discovered that he was really talking nonsense. As a matter of fact, the head of the animal kingdom can never have produced anything beyond himself. For if he were to do so, he would be head of the animal kingdom no longer. Nietzsche says to the man of to-day: "You have produced nothing beyond yourself." But he forgets that were the Superman to arrive to-morrow he could address him in the very same language.

Nietzsche's Blunder.

The Superman, in short, will be guilty of the very same crime as that committed by the ordinary man—the crime of having produced nothing beyond himself. Otherwise he would not be the Superman. Besides, it

duced nothing beyond himself. Otherwise he would not be the Superman. Besides, it can never be said of any living species—although Nietzsche's dictum assumes that it can—that it has produced a species beyond itself. According to the doctrine of evolution, each species—including man—is the termination of a long ancestral line. The

distinction Nietzsche makes between man and the lower animals has no foundation in fact, and is due entirely to a confusion of thought of which great thinkers like Hume or Spencer would never have been guilty. Man has not produced anything beyond himself. But, then, neither has any other animal. Neither has the ape. Neither has the worm. To say otherwise is to say that the higher living species are descended from the lower living species—an error which, as Darwin pointed out 50 years ago, betrays an absurd misunderstanding of the evolutionary process.

The Germ of Truth in the Doctrine.

Still, as I readily admit, there is something in the Superman idea, after all. Certainly, it would be in utter conflict with the idea of evolution to contend that man cannot advance beyond his present status. It would, indeed, be daring to declare that the evolutionary process, a process which has gone on since life appeared on our planet, has suddenly ceased to act with regard to man. The man of the future may transcend the man of the present, just as the man of the present has surpassed the savage of the past. Mr. Jackson says some sensible things about the Superman:—

Nietzsche has not told us what Superman would be like, and doubtless the reason for the omission is that he did not know. He no more knew what Superman would be like than Columbus knew what America would be like. One of the limitations of man is that he cannot imagine anything that is not human; his every dream is a reflection of himself, even though it be the dream of a Jabberwock or a Gollywock or a monster like a Dragon or the Hippogriff. What we have to realise is that Superman will be other than man, but when we have done so we can go no further along that line, for it is impossible for man to visualise Superman as it was for ape to visualise man.

In other words, nobody knows what the Superman will be like. After all, it is not really necessary that we should pay too much attention to the gentleman who will run the world in a million years to come. We should pay him the compliment of supposing that he will be quite able to manage his own affairs. And maybe it would pay us to make an effort to do the same. The very far future no more concerns us than the very remote past. It appears to me that we are only interested in that part of the past which may guide us in our action in the present and that we ought only to be in-

present and that we ought only to be interested in that part of the future, the very immediate future, which is likely to be made happier and freer by our conduct here and now.
