

NIETZSCHE AND HIS PHILOSOPHY.

A CONTRAST.

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III.

The purpose of this article is to show that Kropotkin's conception of man's true relationship with his fellows was the direct antithesis of that of Nietzsche and that whereas Nietzsche's conception was an intuitive one Kropotkin's was the product of many years of practical study and research. That Kropotkin's arrived at his conclusion from a consideration of a multitude of incontestable facts is therefore inconvertible.

To my mind a piquancy and a greater value is added to Kropotkin's diametrical divergence from Nietzsche on root ethics to note the great similarity of their ideas on relatively secondary questions. Both were militant rationalists in matters religious; both regarded Christianity as a decadent influence.

Both regarded the lessons of our past evolution as the guide to our future progress; and both based their major conclusion on the same point of disagreement with Darwinism, as then understood. I have already quoted Nietzsche's words on the struggle for existence as the central fact and dynamic force of evolution, which he flatly denied.

Let me now quote the opening remarks of Kropotkin in his introduction to "Mutual Aid"—

"Two aspects of animal life impressed me most during the journeys which I made in my youth in Eastern Siberia and Northern Manchuria. One of them was the extreme severity of the struggle for existence which most species of animals have to carry on against an inclement Nature; the enormous destruction of life which periodically results from natural agencies, and the consequent paucity of life over the vast territory which fell under my observation.

"And the other was, that even in those few spots where animal life teemed in abundance, I failed to find—although I was eagerly looking for it—that bitter struggle for the means of existence among animals belonging to the same species, which was considered by most Darwinists (though not always by Darwin himself) as the dominant characteristic of struggle for life, and the main factor of evolution."

He proceeds to describe the terrible snow storms, the glazed frosts, and the torrential floods which characterise those inclement regions, causing enormous destruction to animal, insect, and bird life. From these facts he early realised the transcendent importance of "natural checks to over-population," compared with the struggle for subsistence between individual members of the same species. "Paucity of life, under-population—not over-population—being the distinctive feature of that immense part of the globe which we name Northern Asia, I

conceived since then serious doubts—which subsequent study has only confirmed—as to the reality of that fearful struggle for food and life within each species, which was an article of faith with most Darwinists, and, consequently, as to the dominant part which this sort of competition was supposed to play in the evolution of new species." He saw, too, that where, through the harshness of Nature, there was a struggle for food amongst wild ruminants—semi-wild cattle and horses, and other species—that portion of the species which survived the ordeal were so debilitated in vigour and health that "no progressive evolution of the species can be based upon such periods of keen competition." But where as on the lakes he saw, he saw scores of species and myriads of individuals congregate to rear their progeny; in the colonies of rodents; in great migrations of birds; in fact, through all animated nature "I saw mutual aid and mutual support carried on to an extent which made me suspect in it a feature of the greatest importance for the maintenance of life, the preservation of each species, and its further evolution."

Later, when he began to study the relations of Darwinism and Sociology he found it everywhere accepted that the struggle between man and man, animal and animal, was a law of Nature. "This view, however, I could not accept, because I was persuaded that to admit a pitiless inner war for life within each species, and to see in that war a condition of progress, was to admit something which not only has not yet been proved, but also lacked confirmation from direct observation." He was thus induced to devote many years to a deep study of the animal kingdom, of prehistoric and savage man, and of the history of human aggregates, and to accumulate the vast evidence he lays before us in his book which has earned him the lasting gratitude of mankind.

He fully endorses the opinion of Nietzsche that the struggle for existence is exceptional—not general, and offers no adequate explanation of the story of evolution. But where he and Nietzsche part company, is when, after repudiating the struggle for existence theory, they advance their respective alternatives. I have already outlined Nietzsche's Will to Power, somewhat vaguely I fear but perhaps not more vaguely than he himself expounded it. But it will be admitted even by followers of Nietzsche he assumed as the dominant fact in evolutionary progress the direct antithesis of the principle of mutual aid.

By that term Kropotkin intends something distinct from Altruism, Sympathy or Love.

He says: "It is not love to my neighbour—whom I often do not know at all—which induces me to seize a pail of water and rush towards his house when I see it on fire; it is a far wider, even though more vague feeling or instinct of human solidarity and sociability which moves me."

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This instinctive consciousness of the homogeneity of the race, the oneness of the species, which is the dominant factor in life and progress. It is the unconscious recognition that the individual happiness depends on the general happiness, and of the equal rights of all others. Upon this deep-seated formation the higher social qualities are developed, and the true racial progress which is their product.

It is impossible here to follow Kropotkin in his fascinating study of mutual aid in the subhuman species, amongst our savage ancestors, and savage contemporaries.

Like a silver thread steadily strengthening and widening its circumference it first unites man into tribes, then, village communities, mediaeval free cities, and lastly, into national aggregations, with still grander potentialities of future expansion. "Till man to man the world o'er shall brothers be, and a' that."

And the lion, or master morality, which Nietzsche trumpets forth as Nature's fiat, to disobey which is to decay, is the very egoistic principle which from the very beginnings of life, even to the diabolical carnage of this world-war, has destroyed innumerable species and made this earth the tomb of dead empires.

Certainly it is abundantly proved by Kropotkin's research that amongst birds, animals and insects, those species which have the highest development of the sociable qualities, and the lowest of egoism have invariably surpassed all others. It was because man was "par excellence" the gregarious animal with infinitely greater social instincts than any other species that he became the lord and ruler of them all, with dominion o'er land and sea.

For confirmation of these bold statements I must refer readers to the storehouse of knowledge gathered for us by Kropotkin. When they have assimilated that they will agree with me that Nietzsche's moral concepts are the quintessence of degeneracy, and he himself, though unconsciously was the greatest enemy of man.

That some day man will become superman every evolutionist may devoutly hope and believe, but it will not be by the agency of tyranny and slavery, but by the progressive eradication of injustice and oppression, and the consummation of social equity.

"Many a million ages have gone to the making of man. He now is the first, but is he the last? Is he not too base?"