

**OUR DESTINY. THE
INFLUENCE OF SOCIALISM
ON MORALS AND RELIGION.
AN ESSAY IN ETHICS**

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Our Destiny. The Influence of Socialism on Morals and Religion. An Essay in Ethics by
Laurence Gronlund

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LAURENCE GRONLUND

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The Influence of Socialism on Morals and Religion

AN ESSAY IN ETHICS

BY

LAURENCE GRONLUND, M.A.

AUTHOR OF "THE CO-OPERATIVE COMMONWEALTH," AND "QA IBA,"

"Hitch thy wagon to a star."—EMERSON.

SECOND



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OUR DESTINY.

MY OBJECT.

"The nineteenth century so far has been nothing but a riddle."
Jules Simon.

1. Leslie Stephen claims that ethical problems require to be discussed in every generation with a change of dialect. This is emphatically the case now, but the dialect must be very different from that adopted in his *Science of Ethics*. Events are at hand that can be, most fitly, compared with the advent of Christianity.

Three writers have discussed the future that awaits us. Mallock, in *Is Life Worth Living*, warns us that it will be disastrous if we do not return to the old beliefs; Morison, in *The Service of Man*, prophesies it will be glorious if we will only give up all religious notions, while Professor Graham, in *The Creed of Science*, consoles us that our moral and religious acquisitions will not be seriously threatened. I have arrived at very different and much more ennobling conclusions (for which the reader, if he be but patient, will in the course of this essay find, at all events, a sufficient number of reasons), to wit:

That Nationalism (by which I simply mean American Socialism) will be the future economic system in all civilised countries, and that it will be inaugurated, not by violence, but by enthusiasm.

That it will establish virtually the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, mainly by rendering all humanity precious to each of us — what now to all sensible people must seem an impossible feat.

That it will evolve an irresistible belief in God and Immortality which will satisfy all the instincts of the human heart as well as the most developed intelligences.

That is to say : I hold that, though it is perhaps a fact that a majority of those who are called Socialists are avowed Atheists, yet Atheism is not an integral part of Socialism, but merely an accretion upon it, like tartar upon the enamel of the teeth. Such are Atheists, not because they are Socialists, but because they are Frenchmen and Germans. Socialism is eminently religious.

Very little has hitherto been done to persuade the higher order of minds or to place Socialism in its proper light before them. To speak frankly, I can perfectly sympathise with Sir James Stephen, who, in the future, generally foreshadowed by the motto of *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity*, cannot see "a state of society which a reasonable man ought to regard with enthusiasm and self-devotion."¹ I can very well understand that a society confined even to the most fascinating and abundant material enjoyments, but in which morality is simply an invention to abate social jars and frictions, is not seductive to such minds.

William H. Mallock illustrates his fears by saying : "The path of thought has taken a sudden turn around a mountain, and we find ourselves looking bewildered on an utterly unfamiliar prospect. * * * A mist hangs over it, and we have no right to be sure it is the promised land or not." He is very much afraid that it means our spiritual degradation and the destruction of our whole moral civilisation.

Now, I have ventured on this essay because I firmly believe that I can dissipate the mist, and prove to unbiassed minds and sympathetic hearts that it is, indeed, towards "the Promised Land" that the Power behind Evolution has all the time been leading our race. If this "moral civilisation" must pass away, it is only because it will grow into something much grander. At present it is an "immoral" growth : Pharisaism, precisely of a kin to that, so fiercely denounced by Jesus, which makes self-styled "better citizens," who, having never known what temptation means, strut about praising God that they are so much better than their

¹ It will become apparent in the course of this essay, that I take a profound interest in this virile book, though it was intended to be a refutation of Socialism.

humble, temptation-ridden brethren who are tempted every moment of their poor life to act wrongly by this *satanic* system of ours. And the morality which will take its place, I am sure, can be best stated in that sublime precept which embodies the deepest truth: that in which we are bidden to love our neighbours as ourselves. Instead of spiritual degradation, American Socialism, as I understand it, will give us a profound conviction of the presence of God in Humanity, and confer on Humanity a special dignity, fit to inherit "endless times and eternities." And if the American people can be persuaded that Socialism really offers them such an ideal, the next half century will be a period of change compared with which the past fifty years will seem tame and uneventful.

Such an effort seems now particularly opportune. It is well known that a constructive form of Socialism has for some years been evolving among American working-men. The conscience of the country has during the past twelve months been aroused, as it has not been since the anti-slavery agitation—witness the Nationalist and Christian Socialist movements—an evidence that our comfortable classes are becoming conscience of being part of a living organism that suffers. The soil then is fertile and prepared, the time favourable. Throughout our country there is a moral awakening and a deepening ferment. All the signs and portents seemingly declare: God wills it!

What a proud distinction for our American civilisation would it be—compared with that of Europe—if some of the leaders of intellect and conscience among us would, like modern Richards, place themselves at the head of the new social crusade. Nothing, surely, would so fill and fire such men with the needed enthusiasm and devotion as the ideal here presented.

To present this ideal is my present object, and I believe I have the qualifications for making this effort. I do not refer to literary ability. I entered upon my works of Socialist exposition, not from literary ambition, but from a deep conviction that I had something to tell my fellow-men.

The rise and spread of Pessimism is a fact of great interest and significance. "A strange protest surely, that, in these days when

the jubilant chorus is loudest, the note of desolation and despair has broken in as a discord that suddenly finds acceptance, first of all, among the fortunate classes—a philosophy, affirming the nullity of all things, and asking: Is life worth living?" Yet while Pessimism is a symptom of the hollowness at the core of the present order, I, whose lot is certainly not cast among the fortunate ones of this world, answer: Yes! Life, if lightened and warmed by a true philosophy, is worth living. My secondary purpose is to communicate this, my joy in life, to others. In spite of experiencing more than most men the hardships of the established state of things, in spite of privations and lack of sympathy for many years, I know that this is the threshold of the Golden Age, and feel that it is a high privilege to live now, a privilege which I am sure posterity will envy me. My faith makes me an optimist: of this faith I proceed to give an account, confident that it will soon be realised

LAURENCE GRONLUND.