

## NATURE CANNOT REVOLUTIONIZE NATURE.<sup>1</sup>

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“And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

There are some things which can be done, and there are some others which obviously cannot. The curious thing about this very trite fact is, that people continue trying to do these other things, as though they were feasible. This they do both in the mechanical and moral world. Thus: there are some people always, who are inventing perpetual motion, and just on the point of effecting it. Many and diverse, says the *Scientific American*, are the machines invented for this purpose; but it recommends to all future experimenters, as the cheapest and simplest, and equally effective with the best, the plain *tub*. The machine of the tub is operated thus. The vessel chosen is a large one, with handles. It is placed on the floor; the operator then gets into it, and laying hold of the handles with his hands, lifts the tub up to the ceiling. Succeeding in this, he has perpetual motion in its simplest principle.

In every generation, the social, political, and religious tub-lifters are numerous. “Mother Anna Lee,” patron saint of the Shakers, was going to abolish sin by abolishing matrimony. The plan was simple, and perfectly effectual. Convert all the adult sinners, and agree that when converted they shall have no more children. As all actual transgression comes out of original sin, and all original sin is transmitted by birth, one generation more would happily finish the work of Satan on earth. The good mother only made one little mistake in the project. Who were to carry out this excellent plan? The men and women, of course. But men and women usually have a natural propensity, which is more fundamental and regulative than the desire to arrest original sin. So it turns out that poor human nature doesn't lift itself in Mother Lee's tub; but goes on multiplying and increasing, and replenishing the earth with

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<sup>1</sup>—From the *New York Independent*.

young sinners; leaving the world's redemption to the less symmetrical plan of the Gospel.

So Mr. John Stuart Mill proved to his own satisfaction that all individual title to real estate is adverse to the public weal; and the "International" communists, going a little farther, declare, *La propriete c'est le crime!* "Establish community of goods; and public spirit will make the best of everything, and procure the greatest good to the greatest number." Here again, man is to lift himself in his tub. It is forgotten that nature has made the desire for the special welfare of one's self, and of one's own family, far stronger than the desire for the general good. Hence the only possible result of the theory is, not that private property shall be happily substituted by communism; but that happy civilized societies may be plunged into anarchy; and what little private property is left be held with a far fiercer grasp, and defended by personal violence instead of by regulated and benignant law. Natural selfishness will never lift itself into disinterestedness, least of all by force of an infidel creed which makes selfish pleasure its *summum bonum*.

Another instance of the tub-movement is seen in Mrs. Cady Stanton's "Women's Rights." Woman is to be freed from her subordination to man! By whom, forsooth? Not by the selfish, masculine despot, of course; for every impulse of his selfishness prompts him to perpetuate the tyranny. It is to be done, then, by woman. She is to make herself independent of man! But the Creator, who made men and women, has laid down the law, "Unto him shall be thy desire," as the foundation of woman's nature. So that the amount of the claim for women's rights is, again, that the inventor shall lift herself in her tub. Were the realizing of the revolution the only danger, men might safely give Mrs. Cady Stanton their full leave to succeed. She would then find that her real difficulty was unsurmounted; that every one of her "oppressed" sisters, who was a true woman, would voluntarily desert her and seek to be beloved, cherished, and protected by one of the masculine "tyrants"; and this by the inevitable force of a nature a thousandfold more imperative than her zeal for Mrs. Cady Stanton's revolution. And hence again, the only possible result of this movement will be, not the independence and equality of woman, but the substitution of the savage dependence of the

slave-concubine, the "weaker vessel" held and abused by brute force, for the benignant order of scriptural marriage.

These attempts to do the impossible illustrate the most absurd enterprise of all: the attempt of our modern materialistic infidels to abolish religion. The Commune shouted, "Down with property and religion, the two chief enemies of human progress." The only result of success in destroying religion would be to replace it with some mischievous superstition. This is sufficiently evinced, to any sober mind, by a review of the past. Every people, in every age, has had either its religion or its superstition; either its God or its Fetich. Now, a universal result is an index of a permanent cause: there must be something in human nature which compels it to recognize the supernatural. When our would-be philosophers assume that they can exist without this necessity, it is only the very modest pretension that they are themselves supernatural; that is, more than men. That religion is inevitable to man may be inferred again from the uniform result of every attempt which has been made to exclude, or even to omit it from human thought and life. They have always been predestined failures. Thus, those who profess to understand the system of Confucius, nominally so dominant in China, tell us that it is not really a religion, but a social system of morals; that it offers the Chinese mind no object of divine homage save an abstraction; and that it is in fact only a system of moral rules enforcing the idea of civic subordination; the only worship inculcated, that of dead ancestors, being designed merely to strengthen the impulse of filial respect. What now, is the result? There is no people who make a more frequent recognition of the supernatural. To say nothing of the vast system of Buddhism, the whole nation seems enslaved to demon worship, and to the bondage of "the evil eye," "the influence," and the *genii* of localities. Yet the Chinese are at once the most astute and the most materialistic of the Oriental races.

But we may come nearer home. The materialist Thomas Hobbes, of Malmesbury, was said to be more afraid of ghosts than any educated man in England. Atheistic French Democracy professed to abrogate God, the Church, and the Sabbath; but so strong was the religious necessity, that even these madmen enthroned the "Goddess of Reason." Auguste Comte spent

his life in teaching that his "Positive Philosophy" necessarily excluded every supernatural notion. But at its close he finished by establishing a new religion, and a proposed hierarchy with Comte as its hierophant, and the soul of his deceased mistress as a sort of "Queen of Heaven."

These facts may be set in a light still more mortifying to the enemies of Christianity, and more conclusive against their hopes. The weakest religions have always been strong enough to outvie infidelity upon a fair trial. What has it then to hope, in the presence of a true Christianity, with its purity and power? Even popery, the fruitful mother of infidels, has Saturnian strength enough to devour these, her own children. French popery begot Voltaire; and so sorry a religion as French popery was adequate to overthrow Voltaireism. We are told that the effect of national misfortune and humiliation has been to fill the Romish Church again with Frenchmen (and not women only), and to precipitate the people into sham miracles, the pilgrimages, and the other fooleries of the Middle Ages. The Augustan age of classic paganism gave a similar result. Greek and Roman philosophy deemed itself too wise to retain the old traditionary creed of their fathers. They could laugh at the *auspices*, and explode Pan and Ceres, Castor and Pollux, with the herd of imaginary gods. But none the less must the Augustan age have gods from some whither; so philosophic Athens had its altar to "The Unknown God," and imperial Rome imported Judaism, the mystery of the Egyptian Isis, and the magic of the East. Now, gentlemen infidels, we may heartily concur with you in your scurvy estimate of these ancient and modern paganisms, the religions of Jupiter and the Pope. But we remind you, that scurvy as they were, they were sufficient to conquer you. "If these things were done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" If mankind is compelled by the constitution of the soul, in ages when it seemed to have no better choice than between these wretched creeds and you, to prefer either of these to you; what are your prospects against the universal diffusion of the Christian religion, with its ennobling and satisfying truths?

The rational account of these results is in the law with which we set out. Nature cannot revolutionize nature. The human soul has certain original, constitutive, universal laws

of thinking and feeling, the presence of which qualify it as a rational human soul. Hence, whatever any soul thinks or feels is a result of these regulative laws. It is, then, infallibly certain that these cannot be abrogated or expunged by their own results, for the same reason that streams cannot change their own fountains, and children cannot determine the being of their own parents. Let men, for instance, throw any light of plausibility they may around materialism; let them please themselves with the fancy that they have identified mind with matter; let the physiologist pretend to trace the power of thought into his "nerve-force," and to resolve this in turn into electricity. There remains still the stubborn and fundamental fact of psychology, which the common sense of men will, in the end, always construe for themselves, without or against the pretended helps of science; that the consciousness of that which thinks, the subjective Ego, is necessarily prior to all possible perception of objective matter. So that the only terms upon which man can know matter at all involve *a priori* the recognition of mind as inevitably contrasted with matter. That is, the very law of our cognition is, that we must first know mind as not matter in order to know matter.

Our most recent infidelity asserts that nothing is valid except that which is formed on the perceptions of the senses. But unless they accept with us the supersensuous rational belief, that what sense gives us is valid, it is impossible for sense itself to show them any truth.

Again, man must cease to be man before he can strip himself of conscience, of the conviction of moral responsibility, of the sense of guilt for transgression, of hope, of fear, and of the inextinguishable desire for his own well-being. These sentiments are the universal results of fundamental intuitions. All that can be done is to forget them or to obscure them for a time; but when they are revived by the touch of affliction, danger, remorse, or death, man will derive and seek a propitiation for his guilt, a preparation for judgment, and a way to future happiness, as surely as he is man. The sentiment of religion is omnipotent in the end. We might rest in assurance of its triumph, even without appealing to the work of that Holy Ghost which Christianity promises as the omnipotent coadjutor of the truth. While irreligious men of science explore the facts of

natural history, and the fossils of earthly strata, for fancied proofs of a creation by evolution which may dispense with a Creator, the humble heralds of our Lord Christ will continue to lay their hands upon the heart-strings of living immortal men, and find there always forces to overwhelm unbelief with defeat. Does the "Positivist" say these propositions are only of things spiritual? Ay, but spiritual consciousnesses are more stable than all his primitive granite! Centuries hence, if man shall continue in his present state so long, when the current theories of unbelief shall have been consigned to that limbus where polytheism and the Ptolemaic astronomy, alchemy, and judicial astrology lie contemned, the servants of the Cross will be winning larger and yet larger victories for Christ, with the same Gospel which was preached by Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Paul, Augustine and Calvin.

Hampden Sidney, Va., Oct. 1st, 1873.