

A rich life, without the trappings of Mammon

Dark is this age, when presumption is substituted for learning



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Hope without action is a barren undoer . . .

— FELTHAM

From the lowest depth, there is a path to the loftiest height.

— CARLYLE

One year more at its eleventh hour. A grain of sand on the brink of eternity, preparing to fall and disappear in the fathomless Sundial of Father Kronos,¹ the cruel measurer — in space and time. One fortnight more, and 1890 — the year welcomed by the teeming millions of the civilized lands, as it now seems but yesterday, will be replaced with the last stroke of midnight by 1891. The Old Year that was born amongst us, that grew so rapidly beside us, became adult, mature, and has now aged — has lived its life, while we, mortals, have lived but a portion of ours. And now (for many of us), the two will soon become things of the Past.

And what hast thou given us, or left us to remember thee by, O year 1890? Not much, in truth, save evil, disappointment and sorrow. Born in the lap of Dame “Influenza,” thy days have rolled on — as those of thy predecessors have, and as the days of thy successors will, we fear — in the mephitic atmosphere of political and personal strifes, and also, alas, of very unseemly squabbles among Theosophists. Men have lived thee through, O departing year, as usual, more in envy and bitter hatred of each other than brotherly love; and the sister nations — again, as usual — have passed thee in arrogant glorification of self, in vilification of others, and perhaps, in a trifle more lying and bitter, international slanders. Thus, thou art dying as thou hast lived: in the loud din of mutual condemnation, of unexpected exposures, the crash of gigantic fortunes, the ruin of great reputations, and in a pandemonium worthy of all the Evil Spirits and “goblins damn’d” of our glorious age of pretensions to righteousness, and skin-deep civilization. . . . Good bye, OLD YEAR, good bye; thou blessed by so few and cursed by so many!

Woe to us, men and races born in the tail end of the present and most dreadful cycle! Mystics and Theosophists, think that the world will be living for the next decade over a volcano. For the year 1891 is the eldest son of the last Septenary in the said cycle.

¹ [Cf. “Kronos is not only Χρόνος [Chronos], *time*, but also, as M.J.A. Bréal showed in his *Hercule et Cacus* (p. 60), comes from the root *Kar*, ‘to make, to create.’” *Secret Doctrine*, II p. 269 *fn*. Also cf. “Kronos and Chronos,” in our Confusing Words Series. — ED. PHIL.]

On February 17th next, will commence the last series of seven years which will close the first cycle of 5,000 years of *Kālīyuga* — the “Black Age” of the Hindu Brahmans. Thus, in truth, neither the blessings nor the curses of men can influence, let alone alter, the Karma of the nations and men which they have generated in their respective Pasts. But people are blind to this truth. They see the decrees of retributive sentences carried out in the marshalling of public events, but refuse, nevertheless, to comprehend their true causes. “Oh,” they cry out, “it is the immorality and untruthful nature of Mr. A that has caused this new public scandal. It is a calamity brought, through the hypocrisy of A, on B, and C, and D, and thus, through them, it is affecting a whole nation! We righteous men had nought to do with all this. *Ergo*, our plain duty is now to vilify A, agreeably to our pharisaical social code, to express our holy horror of him, and wash our hands of the rest.” . . . Oh, you dear private and political vipers! Has it never struck you, that if the nightmare of a dreaming goose, causing the whole slumbering flock to awake and cackle — could save Rome,¹ that your cackle too, may also produce as unexpected results? That if A, or B, or C — better think at once, of the whole alphabet — has broken a commandment or two, it is simply because, like all of you, he is the product of his times and century. But don’t you know, that the building of a nest by a swallow, the tumbling of a dirt-grimed urchin down the back stair, or the chaff of your nursery maid with the butcher’s boy, may alter the face of nations, as much as can the downfall of a Napoleon? Yea, verily so; for the links within links and the concatenations of this Nidānic² Universe are past our understanding.

Every transgression in the private life of a mortal, is, according to Occult philosophy, a double-edged sword in the hand of Karma; one for the transgressor, the other for the family, nation, sometimes even for the race, that produced him. If its one sharp edge cuts him badly, its other edge may, at a future day, chop into mincemeat those morally responsible for the sins of their children and citizens. One Cain-nation is made to bite the dust, while its slaughtered Abel-sister resurrects in glory. . . .

“He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone” — at the guilty.³ These words appear to have been said in vain, as even Christian law sneers at their practical application. “Heathen” Theosophy alone tries to remember, in our modern day, these noble words addressed to one caught in adultery: “And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more”;⁴ and alone, again, bows in deep reverence before the divine mercy and Buddha-like wisdom of this judgment. But then we are only infidels and “wretched atheists.” Yet this is the key to the seeming “contradictions” in our teachings: we accept and try to follow almost every injunction of Christ — whether the latter be historical or ideal — while feeling the greatest contempt and irritation against that which is now called Christianity but is simply unadulterated Pharisaism.

¹ [Said by Livy, when the geese in the temple of Juno on the Capitoline Hill saved Rome from the Gauls around 390 BC when they were disturbed in a night attack.]

² *Nidānas*, or the concatenation of causes and effects, in the Eastern philosophy.

³ [John viii, 7]

⁴ [*ibid.*, viii, 11]

Prophecy is at a discount in our times. Prophets, both Christian and Heathen, have fallen off in grace. They stand low in the estimation of society, and are out of touch altogether with that portion of mankind which calls itself “cultured.” If the soothsayers are no longer stoned by order of the Sanhedrins of our civilized nations, it is because they are no longer believed in. But who is, in our modern day of Didymoi?¹ The city *Augurs* “on the Stock Exchange” are, perhaps, the only prophets Society now bows to. For the chief Temple wherein our races worship, is the temple of Mammon and his evil imps; and if his High-Priests — the Bulls and Bears — are listened to, it is only because all know that they prophesy but those events which they have themselves carefully prepared, set going and thus “*made to pass.*” To these soothsayers too, methinks, the Karmic tail end of 1890 was not entirely propitious. But let them go. In the good old days of the preceding *Yugas*, however, it does seem as if our earliest Āryan ancestors — whose eldest descendants are now contemptuously included among the “inferior races” — knew and foresaw clearly, the moral state in which *civilised* mankind would be, in the present era.² For see what is *prophesied* in the *Purānas*, generally, and in the *Vishnu-Purāna*, especially. The following is an abridgement from the fourth volume of the latter.

*In those days there will be reigning over the earth, Kings of churlish spirit, of violent temper, addicted to falsehood and wickedness. They in authority will inflict death on women, children and cows, (the sacred animal); they will seize upon the property of their subjects and BE INTENT ON THE WIVES OF OTHERS; they will be of limited power, and will often rapidly rise and fall; their lives will be short, their desires insatiable, and they will display but little piety . . . the world will be wholly depraved. . . . Wealth alone will confer rank; wealth will be the only source of devotion; passion the sole bond of union between the sexes; falsehood the only means of success in litigation; and women objects merely of sensual gratification. [Has the Prophet caught a glimpse in the astral light of the *Kreutzer Sonata* of Tolstoy, we wonder!] The Brāhmanical thread (or the priestly array) will alone constitute a Brahman; dishonesty will be the universal means of success; impudence and presumption will be substituted for learning; liberality will be devotion; a man, if rich, will be alone reputed pure . . . fine clothes will be dignity. . . . Amidst all castes, he who is the strongest will reign over the earth. . . . The people, unable to bear the heavy load of taxes, will take refuge beyond the seas, amongst the valleys of the mountains . . . etc., etc., etc.³*

¹ [From *Διδυμα*, an ancient Greek oracular temple and sanctuary on the Ionian coast. Next to the Apollo of Delphi, the Apollo of Didyma (*Διδυμευς* or *Διδυμαιοσ*, Greek for twin), of the Branchidae line of priests, was the most renowned oracle of the Hellenic world. The *Classical Manual, a Mythological, Historical, and Geographical Commentary on Pope's Homer, and Dryden's Æneid of Virgil*, London: John Murray, Albemarle St., 1833, p. 21, says that Apollo was named Didymaeus “from the double light imparted by him to mankind; the one directly and immediately from his own body; the other by reflection from the moon.”]

² In *Vishnu* and other *Purānas* (the former being surely pre-Christian), the description of the evils of *Kāliyuga* applies most evidently to our present period. It is stated in them

(a) that the “Black Age” will last 1,200 *divine* years, (*i.e.*, 432,000 of the years of mortals); and

(b) that the state prophesied for our world will happen *toward the end of the first half of the first “year” of the Kāliyuga.*

Now as we know from the teachings of occult science that one of the secret sub-cycles or “years of the Devas” lasts *about* 12,000 of our common years, this brings the calculation to the end of this first cycle of 5,000 years since the present Yuga commenced 3,102 years B.C., between the 17th and 18th of February.

³ Translated by H.H. Wilson. Ed. by Fitzedward Hall. London, 1864-70.

The last sentence looks very much like a prophecy regarding the immense wave of European emigration. However it may be, no modern critic could depict more accurately the present state of things. Is it not verily, “as it is written”? Are not most of our Kings of “churlish spirit,” some addicted to falsehood, cruelty and wickedness? Are not our Royal and Imperial Highnesses, and Kings, only *too* truly “intent on the wives of others”? And which of them is a genius, since the days of King Arthur, and the good old kings in the Fairy Tales? Does not wealth in “our day, confer rank” much sooner than real merit; and craft and cunning, false evidence and cant,¹ ensure the best success, before both courts and juries? Outward form alone constitutes in nine cases out of ten, a “man of God,” a priest or clergyman. Women are to this day — in England, before the law at any rate — merely the goods and chattels of their husbands, and mere objects of lust but for only too many. Slanders — private or public — are rarely, if ever, save in cases of blackmail, directed against wealthy men; thus, the rich alone have a chance of being “reputed pure” as the prophet has it. But what of the poor man, of one who has no means of going to law for redress: in England, for instance, where justice is the most expensive thing in the Kingdom, and where it is sold in ounces, and paid in pounds — what of him? And what of one, who, besides being poor, is falsely accused, of that *which he can no more disprove than his enemy can prove* — with the handicap, moreover, against him, that while slander and bad reports require no proofs to be eagerly believed in by charitable Christians at large, he can no more disprove the charge — say, of having murdered his mother-in-law in a dream — than he can pay his “costs” in court? For, does not the smallest lawsuit generally equal three fires and a successful burglary? How is one so situated, to protect and vindicate himself? In the eyes of the whole world, save of his friends, he stands accused of everything his traducers can invent, and thus he remains at the mercy of any blackguard who owes him a grudge. And oh, the terrible helplessness, and the mental agony of the victim, especially in the lands of *blessed* freedom of speech and press, such as England and America! Do what he may, the slandered man will go down into his grave with a name left dragging in the mud of calumny; and the inheritance of his children will be the opprobrium attached to that name.

Blessed are the deaf, the dumb and the blind, for they will not hear themselves traduced and condemned; not in this world of sorrow, at any rate.

When presumption is substituted for learning . . .

But how far was the Purānic prophet right when foretelling among other things that “presumption will be substituted for learning,” in this, our “black” Age?

Something might be said upon the subject, but silence is in some cases golden. Were truth always declared and spoken, life would become very soon not worth living for the sincere man. Moreover, Dr. Koch, of Berlin,² has just caused a lightning rise in the stocks of science, and it would be rather dangerous now to take the latter to task

¹ [Singing in a whining way, from the Latin *cantāre*, to sing. Cant was at first a beggar’s whine, hence hypocrisy. Cf. W.W. Skeat’s *Etymological Dictionary of English*, 1835-1912. — ED. PHIL.]

² [Robert Heinrich Herman Koch, 1843-1910, German physician and pioneering microbiologist.]

for its “presumptions.” Nevertheless, there’s always “balm in Gilead.”¹ The year 1890, has carried off a considerable number of victims, especially among royalty and the “upper ten,”² and its sudden and mad changes of weather have nigh driven frantic the legions of gouty and rheumatic humanity. But the past year, now happily dying, has redeemed its sins by bringing forward a new benefactor of men, in the shape of a Neapolitan professor. This favoured mortal has just found out that growing old, with its gradual weakening of organisms and final decrepitude, is not in the programme of human life at all (nor of animal either); and that perennial youth, from birth till death, is really the lot of all that lives and breathes — even during Kālīyuga. That which causes decay and old age is — again a *bacillus*, you see, and the professor has just discovered this cunning microbe.

The Lord love him — not the bacillus, but the professor, of course! Just fancy the magic effects of this new “grandest discovery” of the age! One has but to invent and prepare a lymph suited for the complete destruction of the monster, inoculate oneself with it and — remain young for ever. This particular lymph is not yet prepared, nor has any one, so far as we have heard, begun to work at its invention. Yet, we have no doubt — in view of the lightning speed of the progress of applied science, that the new lymph will prove a terrible rival to Dr. Brown-Sequard’s “elixir of life,”³ which, we are not sorry to hear, is fast coming to grief. At any rate it is sure to give a point to some of our bottled insecticides, the “unparalleled flea catchers” and the like. The latter is also warranted to kill “instantaneously.” You have but to catch your flea, say the *instructions*, imprison it by dropping it delicately with thumb and finger into the bottle (like King Solomon’s *djinn*), cork it up, and — our acrobatic enemy has *lived!* But the triumphs of chemistry can never parallel, let alone surpass, those of modern bacteriology. We may imagine the roaring popularity of the new lymph — when ready. No more grey hair, shaky teeth with their widowed gums, bleared eyes, deafness, and what is more important still — no more wrinkles. The modern Ninon de Lenclos⁴ of fashionable society will be able to dispense with her daily prayer, “Oh Lord, grant me the favour of confining my wrinkles to my heels!” Every grandmother will have the privilege of marrying as a “blooming and blushing bride” her own grandson’s schoolfellow; nor will any more weeping maidens have to be sacrificed to the purse and title of noblemen in their dotage. No decrepit frames will meet our eye — as the one that so impressed the Prince of Kapilavastu, Gautama, that it became the first step that led him to his Buddaship. Like the Homeric Gods and the heroes of the golden age, we will live and die in the full rosy bloom of youth, and “sweet six-

¹ [Jeremiah viii, 22: Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?]

² [Or “Upper ten thousand,” a phrase coined in 1852 by American poet Nathaniel Parker Willis to describe the upper circles of New York, and hence of other major cities. In 1875, both Adam Bissett Thom and Kelly’s Directory published books entitled *The Upper Ten Thousand*, which listed members of the aristocracy, the gentry, officers in the British Army and Navy, members of Parliament, Colonial administrators, and members of the Church of England. The usage of this term was a response to the broadening of the British ruling class which had been caused by the Industrial Revolution. — *Wikipedia*.]

³ [Charles-Édouard Brown-Séquard, 1817–1894, a.k.a. Charles Edward, Mauritian physiologist and neurologist. At age 72, at a meeting of the Societé de Biologie in Paris, Brown-Séquard reported that hypodermic injection of a fluid prepared from the testicles of guinea pigs and dogs leads to rejuvenation and prolonged human life. It became known, among scientists, derisively, as the “Brown-Séquard Elixir.”]

⁴ [Anne “Ninon” de l’Enclos, also spelled Ninon de Lanclos, 1620–1705, French author, courtesan, freethinker, and patron of the arts.]

teen” will be no longer at a premium. Truly, where are the “seven sciences” of the pre-Christian ages, when compared to our seventy-seven sciences of modern times. And what shall we say of the latter, after [Alexander] Pope has declared, even of the former, that

Good sense, which only is the gift of Heav’n, —
And tho’ no science, fairly worth the sev’n;¹

Withal, Science applied or pure is a mighty power in our times: especially applied Science in its experimental garb, whether dealing with microbe or practical cannibalism. If it has destroyed religion, it has on the other hand established and guided civilisation, which it is now carrying even into the heart of the darkest continents. Therein, its practical observations of comparative “cruelties” — as between Siberia and Africa — have been especially successful. Let us make obeisance to “Modern Research.”

Eternal youth is an alluring, but dangerous gift. The happiest fate for man is not to be born at all, while the second best is to die, no sooner he sees the light.

To destroy old age may be truly glorious; yet we, Theosophists, at any rate many of us, would rather decline the offer. Eternal youth is an alluring, but dangerous gift. Youth is quite long enough as it is, to allow each mortal to spin a Karmic web vast enough to cover the span of several successive lives with a dark veil of sorrow. We agree with the Greek chorus in *Oedipus at Colonus*,² that the happiest fate for man is not to be born at all, while the second best is to die — no sooner he sees the light. Sophocles was a wise man in advising mankind to lament rather than rejoice over every new birth. He, whom the Gods love, dies young, Menander tells us.³ At any rate, old age is less dangerous and more respectable in every country than youth, a defect of which, luckily, man is very soon cured. Progress toward old age is the first approach to the secure haven of life, for every one; and, as Brück has it, it is far from being an evil. The wave of every individual life, he says, rises out of the sea of Being to return to its parent source once more; and in exceptionally healthy people the vital functions become weakened gradually, and without being noticed. A happy old age carries us insensibly, as on a ship, away out of the current of life. We do not ourselves sense the motion, but feel as if the shores were moving and passing before us, until we reach unawares the Ocean of eternal sleep . . .

Just so; and the “Ocean” is preferable to the “Sea of Being” or Life. Life is certainly, and at its best, “but a walking shadow”; and short as it may be, each mortal will find, one day, that he has lived too long. With most of us:

. . . it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing . . .⁴

¹ [Moral Essays, iv, 43-44]

² 1224

³ [Monosticha, No. 425]

⁴ [Macbeth, Act V, scene 5, lines 26-28]

With everyone, without exception, life is as full of pains and sorrows as a bramble bush of thorns. An undesirable thing, at best.

“But this is Buddhist pessimism!” we hear the reader say. Not at all. No more Buddhist than Christian; and quite as Biblical as Buddhist. For, see for yourself. Does not Jacob complain to Pharaoh of the sorrows of life, when asked his age? “And Jacob said . . . The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.”¹ And Joshua the son of Sirach describes life from the beginning to its end as one uninterrupted wave of sorrow! In his view, wherever we look we find but cares, fear, dangers, broken hopes and then — death. Do not the long-suffering Job, and the much-married King Solomon, depict life under the same colours? Life is a series of hard trials for the “Soul”; *a new initiation of the Ego into a new mystery*, every time IT incarnates. Believe me, reader; the luckiest ticket man can draw in that never ceasing, dark Lottery called human life, is an — empty ticket.

Happiness is but a dream on earth.

Since happiness is but a dream on earth, let us be resigned, at least. To do this, we have but to follow the precepts of our respective great and noble Masters on earth. The East had her Śākyamuni Buddha, “the light of Asia”; the West her Teacher, and the Sermon on the Mount; both uttered the same great, because universal and immortal, truths. Listen to them.

Saith the One:

Crush out your pride. “Speak evil of no one, but be thankful to him who blames thee, for he renders thee service by showing thee thy faults. Kill thine arrogance. Be kind and gentle to all; merciful to every living creature. Forgive those who harm thee, help those who need thy help, resist not thine enemies. Destroy thy passions, for they are the armies of Mara (Death), and scatter them as the elephant scatters a bamboo hut. Lust not, desire nothing; all the objects thou pinest for, the world over, could no more satisfy thy lust, than all the sea water could quench thy thirst. That which alone satisfies man is Wisdom — be wise. Be ye without hatred, without selfishness, and without hypocrisy. Be tolerant with the intolerant, charitable and compassionate with the hard-hearted, gentle with the violent, detached from everything amidst those who are attached to all, in this world of illusion. Harm no mortal creature. Do that which thou wouldest like to see done by all others.”

Saith the Other:

“Be humble.” Resist not evil, “judge not that ye be not judged.” Be merciful, forgive them who wrong thee, love thine enemies. Lust not; not even in the secrecy of thy heart. Give to him that asketh thee. Be wise and perfect. Do not as the hypocrites do; but, “as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.”²

¹ [Genesis xlvii, 9]

² [Luke vi, 31]

Noble words these. Only how far are they practicable, in the Nineteenth Century of the Christian era, and the tail end of the Brāhmanical cycle? Alas! While a Protestant Bishop was opposing these precepts, consequently his Master, here in England, by showing the impossibility of any civilised State carrying them out in practice — (civilisation first, and Christianity afterwards?) — a French journalist of note was doing the same across the Channel. Reviewing the Buddhist Lectures of Professor Léon de Rosny, of Paris,¹ Anatole France² makes his readers feel that it is a Forlorn Hope, indeed, to think that the present generations of Europe will ever attempt to carry out the noble commandments of either Christ or Buddha; and hence that true Theosophy is doomed to be, for the present, a failure in its practical realization. He writes:

Ah me! If He did live, as I firmly believe He did, Śākyamuni was the most perfect of men. “He was a Saint!” — as Marco Polo exclaimed, after hearing his history. Yea, he was a Saint and a Sage. But this kind of Wisdom is not suited for the ever active European races, for the human families that are so strongly possessed by life. The Sovereign panacea discovered by Buddha as a remedy against the Universal evil, will never do for our temperaments. It demands renunciation, and what we want is to acquire; it teaches us to desire nothing, and lust and desire are stronger in us than life. As a final reward, we are promised Nirvana, or absolute Rest, when the thought alone of such a rest creates a feeling of horror in us. No; Śākyamuni Buddha has not come for us, nor can he save us — whatever M. de Rosny may do or say!

No; He cannot. But no more can Christ, as it seems. Buddha was not alone in offering the remedy of “personal indifference” to the allurements of this world, or care for the *self* of matter, as a *panacea* against the world’s evils, its sins and temptations. The “Kingdom of God” of Jesus, is but another name for “Nirvana.” His injunctions to take no thought for the morrow, nor as to what we shall eat, drink, or clothe our body with, but to live, as “the fowls of the air and the lilies of the field” are but another version of the teachings of Buddha.³ Both the Masters tried to impress their followers with the idea that “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof”; but so far, the Buddhist laymen alone have tried to follow the injunction, while the Buddhist clergy have done so *literally*, and do so to this day.

Many and great are the reforms enacted in this age; and yet, as year rolls after year, each bringing some new light, each speeding the wheel of progress and civilisation, no *new* reform seems to affect or alter the *old* man. It is a

Forlorn Hope

indeed! Let us then say goodbye to the Old Year and reproach him no longer. Let us neither curse nor bless him; but saying “Sufficient unto *the year* 1890 is the evil thereof,” let Karma dispose and take care of the coming 1891.



¹ [Léon Louis Lucien Prunol de Rosny, 1837–1914, French scientist, anthropologist, linguist, Japonologue, orientalist, Americanist Columbian, epistemologist.]

² [Anatole France, 1844–1924, French poet, journalist, and novelist.]

³ Vide *Matthew* vi, 24-34 and vii.