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OR  
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EDITED BY THE HONORARY SECRETARY,  
CAPTAIN FRANCIS W. H. PETRIE, F.G.S., &c.

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## ORDINARY MEETING, APRIL 18, 1887.

D. HOWARD, ESQ., VICE-PRES., CHEM. SOC., IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the last Meeting were read and confirmed.

Works presented to the Library :—

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|--|-------------------------------------|
| “Proceedings of the Royal Society.”            | <i>From the same.</i>               |
| “Memoirs of the Imperial University of Japan.” | ” ”                                 |
| “The Plants of New South Wales.”               | By Rev. W. WOOLLS, Ph.D.,<br>F.L.S. |

The following Paper was read by the Author :—

*PRACTICAL OPTIMISM.* By CANON W. SAUMAREZ SMITH,  
B.D., Principal of St. Aidan’s College, Birkenhead.

THE title of this Paper is derived from a passage in J. Sully’s able and interesting book on *Pessimism*. The information, the suggestions, and the arguments in that book are full of interest; but there is a fundamental defect in the treatment of his subject which prevents the book from being a complete presentation of the *data* which claim consideration from those who are seeking for the whole truth in the matter under discussion. Mr. Sully sets aside the “theological” aspect of the question as consisting of “transcendental conceptions” which “anticipate” experience, or explain it *a priori*, and must therefore be regarded as unscientific. And yet he admits that such conceptions are facts of human nature, and make for an optimistic as distinguished from a pessimistic view of life. “Theological truth,” he says, “sometimes, at least, professes to rest to some extent on experience, and to be a fair inference from observable facts. Consequently, if—as must clearly be the only correct way—we interpret experience in its widest sense as including facts

and all legitimate inferences from these, it may be urged that we are bound to include theological ideas in our investigation. For example, Christian theology, recognising the misery of our present life, teaches that this misery is to be more than compensated, in the case of a certain proportion of mankind, by future blessings. Now, if this future existence is inferable either from historical or other *data*, it must plainly be included as an element in the life whose value is to be determined. Again, this theology tells us that the existence of a benevolent and wise Creator is inferable from the complex combinations of the world. If so, we may be sure that even if human life, so far as we can observe it, seems to be other than happy, this defect will be somehow made good."

And in the passage, with an allusion to which I commenced the paper, after he has argued that an "*unqualified* optimism would speedily relax all the higher kinds of moral endeavour," he says that "if we frame a PRACTICAL OPTIMISM, and say that life is as good as it could be, provided we make the best of it (which seems to be the practical faith of the best Christians), we, no doubt, reach an idea most encouraging to effort."

It is of such optimism that I am now to speak.

2. My object in this paper is not to enter into anything like a historical review of contending theories, or to make a detailed criticism of any particular theory, but to submit a philosophical estimate of the worth of life, as viewed from a *Theistic* standpoint, and to advocate as reasonable an optimism which is neither baseless nor superficial. I believe, with Professor Flint, that, "the true reading of human life, when it is surveyed in a sufficiently comprehensive way, is not pessimist," and that we cannot survey it "in a sufficiently comprehensive way" unless we deliberately take into account those religious, or theological, *data* of human experience and history, which Mr. Sully acknowledges to be "facts," though he chooses to exclude them from his line of reasoning, with the result that that reasoning becomes "narrow and partial." The exclusion of these *data* makes it impossible, too, to be content with that "scientific meliorism" which some have suggested as countervailing the gloomy and negative tendencies of pessimism. For "meliorism," which stands aloof from the acknowledgment of a supreme Divine will, must, in the face of the pessimist's objections, stop short of being a genuine and adequate motive to sustained moral endeavour.\*

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\* As there will not be many direct quotations in my paper, I may as well mention, in a note, some of the books I have consulted in working out my

3. We must start with a clear view of what we mean by the antithetical terms Optimism and Pessimism. It is patent that for minds of limited capacity there can be no all-embracing view of the universe. No finite beings can determine what is absolutely best, or absolutely worst. Such knowledge can only belong to an Omniscient, Eternal, Self-existent Being. But man can reason from phenomena to laws. He can trace tendencies and characterise them; and from accumulated experiences and observations he can arrive at large conclusions which have for him a most important practical value. Thus, in estimating the worth of the world and of human life, he discerns both a *malefic* and a *felicific* tendency at work; and, accordingly as he considers the former or the latter to preponderate, does he become "pessimist" or "optimist" in his speculations. Optimism is the theory that good is normal, and evil abnormal, and that the whole course of things make for good. Pessimism is the theory that evil is the normal condition of existence; that good is temporary, evanescent, illusive, and that Non-being is preferable to Being.

These two theories correspond to two sets of phenomena which come under the ratiocinative and reflective observation of men. Optimism is, logically, antecedent to Pessimism. It is more natural to think that things tend to good than to think that they tend to evil. It is more natural to be hopeful than to be otherwise, and the saying has become proverbial that "hope springs eternal in the human breast." Yet in human life and history this hopefulness is continually dashed with bitter antagonistic experiences, and the question again and again recurs—in one and another shape, but substantially identical—*Is life worth living?*

4. The Pessimistic philosophy represented in Schopenhauer and Hartmann is a reflection of the general unrest and disappointment of our age. It is, as has been often remarked, a reaction from the somewhat inconsiderate optimism of the last century. One reviewer, speaking of Schopenhauer, attributes the rise of much pessimistic literature to the "morbid disappointment which followed the French Revolu-

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subject. The principal ones are Sully's *Pessimism*; Dr. Gass's *Optimismus und Pessimismus*; Caro's *Pessimisme au XIX<sup>e</sup> Siècle*; and Ribot's *Philosophie de Schopenhauer*. I may also mention Leibnitz's *Theodicee* in Janet's *Extracts*; Flint's *Theism, and Anti-Theistic Theories*; Wright's *Book of Koheleth*; Hartmann's *Die Selbstzersetzung des Christenthums und die Religion der Zukunft*. I have also recently perused J. H. Clapperton's *Scientific Meliorism*.

tion." Nor does it seem improbable that the excitement produced in some minds by premature hopes of rapid political and social progress in an age of extraordinary scientific discovery, and of application of science to the material wants of men, tends to beget an impatient attitude of mind, which, when not counterbalanced by moral and religious motives, is apt to foster a despairing view of the world, and of the capabilities for happiness of human life.

Reasoned pessimism, however, cannot stand critical analysis, for it is inconsistent with the facts of human history, and with the faculties of the human mind. It is entirely inadequate to explain the positive and persistent aspirations of human nature. As a philosophy it becomes unmeaning, unless egoistic Hedonism be regarded as the only possible explanation of life, and pain and suffering be treated as final and absolutely independent facts. Intellectually viewed, pessimism is mental suicide, and to assert that "all is illusion" is a mystical despair, not a rational affirmation.

Optimism has far more *a priori* reason in its favour than the opposite theory; but it is confronted by the mysterious existence of many phenomena which seem to hinder the pleasure, the progress, and the happiness of mankind, and to interfere with that tendency to harmony and joy which the optimistic theory asserts. For the operation of what we call "evil" compels us to regard evil not merely as privation and defeat, but as a strange, antagonistic force which mars joy, hampers progress, and seems inconsistent with the ascription of perfect goodness either to God or to Nature.

5. The truth is that both lines of speculation can be supported by an array of facts and experiences. But the practical resultant which emerges from a fair and full comparison of the arguments that can be advanced on either side is distinctly anti-pessimistic. It should not be forgotten that the question can only be fairly dealt with by recognising that we have to do with metaphysical and ethical phenomena, and that—however much the discoveries of physical science may modify philosophical theories—it is still to the mental, and not to the materialistic, side of our knowledge that disputants on all fundamental problems that touch human action and desire must make their final appeal. This being allowed, it will be perceived that truth-seekers in this dispute aim not at a demonstrative proof, but at moral certainty, and that what we have to look for is not a complete ("scientific") explanation, but a reasonable inference concerning the principles which should guide us in our view of the constitution

and nature of things around us, and of our own action as intelligent beings.

6. That there is much to perplex, to disappoint, to sadden human life, and our views of human destiny, is beyond all question. But pessimism as *philosophy* is a very different thing from pessimistic utterances in *poetry*. The latter express the idealised tension of individual sorrow, and are emotional claims for sympathy with individual suffering; the former lays it down as a permanent and dominant principle that all hope of human progress and happiness is vain. The plaintiveness of the poetry is a natural, though often overstrained, outcome of human experience; but the claims of the pessimist as a dogmatic philosopher are arrogant and untenable. His method is inadequate, and his arguments admit of an easy *reductio ad absurdum*. A "philosophie qui maudit la vie" is a strange and startling phenomenon indeed, when it predicates objective, universal evil, and by a pretentious comparison of pains and pleasures in life "makes nature bankrupt" of joy. The method of such a philosophy may be described as a compound of arrogance and moral blindness; for it deliberately refuses to take account of the higher instincts and ideals of the *reflective*, as distinguished from the *sensitive*, portion of human nature. It exaggerates by descriptive accumulation all the pains and evils that may befall men in reference to the individual life, and pretends to estimate the value of life by a calculation of a *quantitative* character, where the real solution of the problem depends upon the correct adjustment of mutually *qualitative* facts. It views all things from the standpoint of "what is pleasant?" and practically ignores the question, "what is right?" It refuses to entertain the idea of God, and substitutes for it the irrational concept of an Unconscious Will. Nor can we fail to detect the absurdity and grotesqueness of pessimistic philosophy, if we really test its reasoning as an offered explanation of the world, or of life. When we are told, in effect, that man's life is only a struggle for existence, with the certainty of being conquered; or, again, that the *summum bonum* to be aimed at is a state of "perfect indifference," "where subject and object disappear, and there is no more will, nor representation, nor world;" when it is laid down, as the true doctrine, that all conscious beings are the victims of a gigantic illusion, and are "pitiable puppets" of an irresistible impulse which makes life a succession of sufferings, and compels men to act contrary to their true interest, which is to cease to be; may we not justly term such philosophising, irrational, and absurd? The sum

of Schopenhauerism is this: an unconscious will somehow objectivises itself in individual beings who, finding consciousness a burden, seek, by means of true knowledge, the goal of utter unconsciousness!\* Nor is Hartmann's theory less absurd, though his exposition of it is, perhaps, more interesting and less misanthropical. Hartmann reasons from "the Unconscious" in terms of consciousness. He ascribes to It—the great THAT whence comes all' that is; the central monad which manifests itself in consciousness and matter—all the attributes of a perfect intelligence, the predetermination of a course, the omniscient use of means, the regulation of a world-course, which, although bad all through, is to end in the perfect peace of primitive unconsciousness. Surely this is either making irony of all philosophic exposition, or it is very unphilosophical. The suicide of existence cannot be the explanation of it.

7. In all philosophy we have to choose between a theistic and a non-theistic line of speculation. If the "theistic inference" is a valid one; if we are led by the observation of what we call "nature" around us, by reflection upon our own mental constitution, and by certain moral intuitions or requirements, to the acknowledgment of a Supreme Being in whom the ideas of power, wisdom, and righteousness, which are revealed to us in our own mental experience and by the history of mankind, find their source and culmination,† we shall become "practical optimists." Pessimism is only possible for those who will not accept, or who arbitrarily set aside, Theism. And Optimism varies according to the degree in which men's minds realise the existence and operation of a Divine Will superior to finite conditions and transcending human science. The Pantheism which confounds God with "Nature," the Materialism which will not look above "Nature," and the Atheism which refuses to believe in God at all, tend to a pessimistic view of life; and although theories of natural development or evolution may throw some consolatory gleams upon the view of the world-process, the optimistic tendency will eventually fail to be of any practical worth, when faith in a Divine Order, regulated by a Personal will, dies out.

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\* "A Schopenhauer," says Emerson, "with logic and learning and wit, teaching pessimism—teaching that this is the worst of all possible worlds, and inferring that sleep is better than waking, and death than sleep—all the talent in the world cannot save him from being tedious."

† Lotze speaks of God as "the One Being whom we regard as the *indispensable presupposition* of all intelligibility in finite things."

Theistic speculation, on the other hand, must be optimistic, whether we argue from our knowledge or from our ignorance in reference to the Supreme Being. What we know, even apart from the teaching of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, encourages the conviction that the Supreme Will is beneficent, and not maleficent. What we know, when we receive the revelations in those Scriptures, makes that conviction ineradicable. And then our ignorance of the whole scheme and constitution of nature serves to check complaint as well as doubt. We cannot fall into a boastful optimism and ignore evil, but we feel that, as within our knowledge, so beyond it, the constitution and order of things must perpetually tend to that which is good.

8. This conviction (so far as the philosophical expression and exposition of it is concerned) is best seen in the optimism of Leibnitz. His *Theodicée* is an able and thoughtful endeavour to vindicate God's government of the world from a *rational* point of view. Whatever weakness or defect may be found in the reasoning, considered as a complete argument, it is of permanent value, and exhibits an irrepressible impulse of Godward consciousness in a cultured mind. Leibnitz argued that God, as the first reason of things, must be perfect in wisdom, power, and goodness. He could not fail, therefore, to choose what is best. To the Divine Intelligence all possibilities represent themselves, and from "an infinity of possible worlds," the one selected must have been the "best possible." It was very easy for Voltaire, in his clever but superficial satirical tale of *Candide*, to ridicule this notion, but almost all the sting of the satire is taken away when we remember that Leibnitz did not argue that this world is the best of all possible worlds *absolutely*, but as viewed *relatively* to what we must conceive as the process of Divine government of the universe. To arrive at a true estimate, we must not only consider isolated details and events, we must regard "toute la suite des choses." "Il se pourrait que l'univers allât toujours de mieux en mieux si telle était la nature des choses qu'il ne fût point permis d'atteindre au meilleur d'un seul coup." This principle of "perfectibility," according to a Divine order, is intellectually reasonable, and practically encouraging.

9. It is true that this optimistic theory may become a superficial and abstract dogmatism, and by its one-sidedness provoke a grim counter-statement of the miseries and disappointments which characterise much of human life as known to and observed by us, and seem *primâ facie* to refute the more sanguine philosophy. The "easy-going optimism" of

Shaftesbury, who thought that "good-humour was not only the best security against enthusiasm, but the best foundation of piety and true religion;" the complacent optimism represented in Pope's *Essay on Man*; the emotional optimism of Rousseau, were all provocative of such counter-statements, and needed the correction thus supplied. These optimists failed to recognise sufficiently the existence and operation of evil in the world; and I think we may safely say that none of the three mentioned were "religious" enough to see the true solution of the controversy between the optimistic and the pessimistic views of life. They were one-sided theorists, and neglected to consider the facts which told against their rose-coloured schemes. The pessimist is unfair in refusing to take note of the tendencies to good which exhibit themselves in nature and human nature. The "theoretical" optimist, on the other hand, does not fairly confront the darker side of the problem, and becomes an unsafe guide, because he is a partial judge. To concede that all is bad, and that life is a hopeless illusion, is to fly in the face of a great many patent facts, both in individual life and in the history of the human race. To argue, on the contrary, that all is good, and that what we call evil is only imperfection, and may be put out of account in our estimate of the progress of the race, is also against the facts which we are bound to consider.

10. But the concession that all is not good, and that there are mysteries of pain and evil, which must prevent us from the dogmatic assertion—"One thing is clear, *whatever is, is right*,"—will not prevent the "practical" optimist from arguing that "whatever is, is" *on the road* "to right." Do the facts, taken all together, allow us to admit that evil is an absolute and irremediable anomaly in the affairs of men? What is the universal tendency of things? Is it good or bad? These are inquiries in reference to which we may hope to attain practical information and guidance, even where we may not acquire complete knowledge. But, primarily, we must neither deny nor with a light heart attenuate, the fact that what is for us evil exists and operates. A dissonance and discord make themselves felt which forbid the assertion that the present condition of things is "the best possible," or as good as it might be, if circumstances were different; and this disturbing element in our contemplation of the world and of life demands investigation.

The existence of this disturbance is indisputable, and must be examined by every truth-seeker who wishes either to

learn or to teach. Its origin may be, in the ultimate form in which the problem presents itself, inexplicable; but the question, "What is evil?" presses for some sort of answer.

11. Leibnitz, as is well known, classified evil as metaphysical, physical, and moral. In the first aspect evil is simply the *imperfection* which we necessarily connect with all finite existence; in the second aspect evil is *pain*, as opposed to pleasure; in the third aspect evil is *sin*, as opposed to righteous action. This classification is a convenient and an instructive one, and saves us from much confusion of thought. Without some such distinction we are in danger of calling evil good, and good evil, for our first inclination is to call everything that is painful bad, and to call everything that is pleasurable good; but to recognise that pleasure may be hurtful, and that pain may be beneficial, is a conviction which depends very much upon our making a correct analysis of what constitutes evil.

12. Thus we are met by the important consideration, how are we to judge concerning good and evil? The individual experience cannot be a sufficient test; it needs a wide comparison of the phenomena of human life and history to enable us to draw a general inference which may be of practical worth. It will be at once perceived that such a comparison involves many social, political, and theological problems, and that, as our inquiry is necessarily in its ultimate form an ethical one, the claims of the Christian religion to be the universal religion for mankind has much to do with the question of the worth of life. All philosophy of life must be affected by our views of God, and of what we receive as revelations of His will and purposes. We leave aside from this discussion, as far as possible, dogmatic theology; yet we venture to assert that those who will not allow the ideas of Divine Will, Righteousness, and Goodness, as historically presented in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, to enter into their reasoning concerning the value of life and the destiny of men, are guilty of a most unphilosophical omission.

13. When we have recognised the need of making distinctions between various forms of so-called "evil," and have honestly consulted the historical materials at our disposal, we find three notable phenomena which interfere with the optimistic view of life and human destiny—viz. pain, sorrow, and sin. Of these, the first interferes with sensuous enjoyment, the second interferes with mental tranquillity, and the third interferes with moral satisfaction.

14. But it can, without difficulty, be shown that pain and sorrow are, as a matter of fact, in many cases subservient to

higher and wider good ; and that much that is permanently good results from the temporary incidence of bodily or mental suffering.

No one, for instance, can doubt that pain often acts as discipline, stimulant, and warning. Is there not a whole philosophy of pain as an educational agent in the proverb, "A burnt child dreads the fire?" The spur of pain and discomfort incites men to make effort for ameliorating their condition ; and the educational influence of pain upon every one of us is in the line of progress to what is better.\* "It is the pain of hunger that we shun in taking food ; the pain of fatigue that prompts rest ; the pain of injury that compels us to take care of our bodies."

The "*duris urgens in rebus egestas*" often leads upwards, while indolent epicureanism produces first stagnation, and then decay. The struggle with difficulties (whether physical or moral) may be often temporarily painful, and yet be an indispensable condition of success ; and what is, at first, painful effort becomes pleasurable in retrospect ; or, sometimes, itself grows into a pleasurable exercise of activity.

Pain is not inherently an evil. A famous preacher has asserted that "there is just as much evidence of a design to produce pain as to produce pleasure" in the world, and that it was "a grand mistake of the old reasoners in their arguing for the goodness of God" to try to prove that there was more evidence of design for pleasure. He was probably speaking of pain in its effect upon the moral training of men ; but even if we only regard the "physical" aspect of the universe, as known to us, is it reasonable, when we think of mysterious natural forces of a destructive character like poisons, or explosive gases, or when we view with dismay the effect of great "natural calamities" like earthquakes, or hurricanes, or floods—is it reasonable, I say, in face of all that the universe presents of design, order, beauty, and vitality, to infer that the constitution of nature does not tend to general happiness and enjoyment ? is it not rather reasonable to infer that what we term natural calamities may be, in some cases, reparative and remedial agencies, needed for the due balance and right adjustment of the cosmic system ? By such calamities, too, intellectual and moral progress is encouraged. They give incitement to human effort, and to the search after further knowledge in the way of remedying the

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\* "Le grand agent de la marche du monde c'est douleur," says Renan, somewhere.

disastrous effects upon human life and comfort where remedy is possible. The occurrence of storms, *e.g.*, leads to greater care and science in shipbuilding; the occurrence of pestilence, to better sanitary regulations, and so forth. "Der Kampf mit der Natur," says Dr. Gass, "umfasst von Anbeginn einen beträchtlichen Theil der Menschenbildung, und er hat, so unzählbar auch die Opfer sein mögen, der Menschheit weit mehr verliehen als geraubt." Many facts will show us that pain is often subservient to good, and conducive to a higher stage of happiness. And if we once desert the low ground of "egoistic Hedonism" as a standard of human happiness, we come to discern the fact that to give up our own pleasure and to encounter pain is often a higher form of what is, in effect, *pleasant*, because it is in a mental or moral sense *good*.

15. Sorrow and mental suffering are not evils in an absolute sense. They temporarily interfere with individual happiness, but they often have, and seem intended to have, a disciplinary and awakening effect both upon the intellect and the conscience. The longing for a more complete and higher life is a spiritual motive within men, which—even apart from definite revelation of a life to come—elevates the soul, and so makes men in reality happier than they were before the suffering came. Moreover, both the experience and the observation of suffering tends to evoke sympathetic capabilities which widen men's outlook, and cultivate a humane and philanthropic spirit. Nor will it be denied that "endurance" is often nobler than "enjoyment," and intimates truths of self-control and self-sacrifice which point to a higher goal than individual self-complacency, and develop possibilities of a social harmony yet to be attained where every part, in mutual adjustment, shall contribute to the happiness of the whole body.

16. Sin, or moral evil, is the only form of evil of which we have to acknowledge that it seems absolutely antagonistic to good, to happiness, to hope, to harmony; and "sin is universal." Here is the greatest mystery and perplexity for the optimist philosopher. Violation of moral order is mischievous because it is the opposition of the will of intelligent beings to a Supreme Law, and an absolutely Righteous Will; yet where is there not such violation? and why is this violation of moral law permitted? "It is sometimes asked," says M. Naville, in his lectures on *The Problem of Evil*, "why did not God make the creature incapable of sin—that is to say, *necessarily* good? It is forgotten that necessity excludes liberty; that where there is no liberty there is neither good nor evil; so that the idea of a creature necessarily good really implies a

contradiction." The possibility of sin is "the condition of created liberty," "but the cause of the actual realisation of evil exists nowhere else than in the will which rebels against law." The exercise of this rebellious self-will introduces disaster and discord into human history. And the worst kinds of suffering and sorrow are the results of sin. The fact, however, that suffering follows sin—dogs it, we may say—is surely a hopeful feature in the survey of this strange, disturbing influence in the world of humanity. Whether such suffering be viewed as penal, or as remedial, it speaks of a tendency in the whole order of things which is contrary to sin. The solution, however, of the mystery of moral evil, and the cure of the mischief, must be confessed to be beyond the grasp of our finite philosophy. But though in this matter philosophy can help us little, the Revelation from God which Christians allege to have been made in Jesus Christ helps us much, at any rate in a *practical* way, and allows us to hope that sin and all its sad results in the world may be regarded as "the conditions of a grander order" of things yet to be revealed.

17. I have said nothing yet of death, as an evil. To the Pessimist, privation of life ought to be, by his very theory, rather good than evil. To the bare Materialist, death is but a cessation of molecular movements of matter. To the spiritualist philosopher, death must appear to be an emancipation. To the Christian believer it is the gate into a higher realm of life. That death is so generally dreaded and viewed as an evil, even by those whose circumstances of earthly life seem most miserable, is a strong argument against the truth of a pessimistic philosophy, and a strong argument in favour of the theory which regards life and the faculties of living as designed for happiness.

To those who believe in the spiritual capacity of man, and yet have doubt as to any future existence, death must present itself as a burden and a sadness, because it quenches aspiration and stops progress. Such a view can only be cured by the hope of a life to come.

Death, in its relation to sin, is a theological topic, and cannot be dealt with in this paper.

18. Sufficient has been now said by way of protest against taking up with the philosophy of despair. The positive considerations in favour of an optimistic philosophy are partly derived from a comprehensive logical inference, and partly from an intense moral conviction. When we look at the world as a whole, we perceive a preponderance of phenomena that make for general happiness, and a wonderful adjustment

of a compensatory kind which keeps the cosmic mechanism in order.

And when we fairly face the problems of human life in the light of the facts of human history, we find a perpetual tendency that makes for righteousness rather than for unrighteousness. To this the Christian believer adds a faith in the special revelation made in Jesus, the Christ, and the whole horizon of speculation becomes lit up with radiance of a better day coming.

19. The right view as to the value of the world depends upon a patient consideration of the way in which all the phenomena within reach of our knowledge work together. What is the impression produced upon our minds when we estimate by the total resultant, and not by our opinion of individual details? Is there not a *universitatis pulchritudo*, notwithstanding any long catalogue that may be made of what may seem to us defective or repellant phenomena? Modern researches in science have added marvellous testimony to the existence of pervading design, and adaptation to environment in nature around us. And this thought is of itself at once awe-inspiring and consoling.

20. But the problem which most intimately concerns men is the worth of human life. Here, again, it would be a mistake to judge of the value of life by individual experience, or by exceptional cases of sorrow, poverty, or pain. The materials for judgment are not simple, but complex. And the whole inquiry is a question of *tendency*, not of phenomena isolated from the general current and order of things—of *dominant law*, not of what appears to be specific pains or evils, when viewed individually.

Hence the importance of a historical survey of humanity, and of a wide comparison of the different varieties of possible enjoyment for different classes of men and types of human energy.

History will teach us that human progress is, on the whole, stronger than degeneration; and that, in proportion to the elevation of ethical standard, man's capabilities of happiness and hope increase. The degeneration itself is good so far as it leads, not only to "a survival of that which is fittest," but to a prevalence of higher ideas and better conditions of life. And the comparison of the many ways in which life can be used and enjoyed will enable us to perceive that the sum total of even actual present happiness is apt to be disregarded by those who—either in expression of pessimistic sentiment or in construction of an indictment against optimism—look only at the dark side of things. The verdict of a careful historical survey of humanity is that there is a constant

evolution of good out of evil which tends in the direction of general progress; and that there is much general enjoyment of life.

It must too be specially borne in mind that the inquiry is predominantly an *ethical* one. Buddhism and Epicureanism, or Hedonism, may be regarded as representing the opposite poles of the search into the true object of life; and it is only by some practical approximation to an ideal *summum bonum* that we can estimate the full meaning or value of life.

Both these methods of viewing life lead to pessimism—one directly, the other in an indirect way. The former, by a universal negation of the happiness of conscious life, is blankly pessimist; the latter, by a mistaken affirmation that pleasurable sensation is the sole standard of human happiness, leaves the soul starved and helpless when it comes into contact with pain and death. Yet it should not be forgotten that the existence and wide acceptance of Hedonistic standards, especially when pleasures like the pleasures of culture, of the pursuit of knowledge, and of intellectual activity are taken into consideration, point in an opposite direction to that of pessimistic philosophy. The inquiry into the worth of life, being an ethical one, is concerned with personal, subjective, mental conditions, rather than with external circumstances. Subjective joys, pleasures, aspirations, hopes, may outweigh all that seem, to an outside observer, to be pains and penalties of life.

21. But without religion no firm standing-ground for the optimist can be reached. An infinite region of mystery lies beyond our reach which cannot be fathomed by finite science or philosophical speculation.

The facts that we can reach show that, while pessimistic sentiment has a *locus standi* in the circumstances of human life and the things which condition it, pessimism as philosophy is irrational. On the other hand, the facts show that, while optimistic sentiment may sometimes lead to a flimsy and superficial estimate of life, optimism, as philosophy, is more rational than its opposite. It needs, however, to be complemented by religious sentiment and religious truth. For that there is a disturbing element which affects human nature and human society in a most painful manner is indisputable; and for this moral disturbance neither science nor philosophy can be the cure.

21. The Christian religion recognises what lies at the basis of pessimistic sentiment, and yet enables us to gain a position in which *practical optimism* is perceived to be a true philosophy of life. Such optimism is the result of persistent

faith in an Ideal, *i.e.*, a Divine, order and constitution of things, and to this Divine order the best and most instructive testimony which can be found anywhere is given to men in the Bible. Faith in God is brought into highest intensity and reality by the outcome of the progressive teaching of the Hebrew Scriptures, which culminates in the religion of Christ. When Hartmann asserts that in an age which is being increasingly secularised, Christianity will become "what it exclusively was at its origin, the best consolation of the poor and wretched," yet confesses that "only slowly and gradually can the power of an idea so great as the Christian be broken," he is really bearing testimony to the fact that Christianity meets the deepest needs of the human race, and prevents men from entertaining a philosophy of despair. And the following words from Amiel's *Journal Intime* may be well contrasted with this contemptuous reference of Hartmann to the Christian religion:—"This orgie of philosophic thought" (says Amiel, so he describes pessimism), "identifying error with existence itself, and developing the axiom of Prudhon, 'Evil is God,' will bring back the mass of mankind to the Christian theodicy, which is neither pessimist nor optimist, but simply declares that the felicity which Christianity calls eternal life is accessible to man."

22. Faith in a future life—or the hope of a future existence, *i.e.* of a timeless, ideal progress for the individual and for society—is an essential factor of consideration when we ask the question, Is life worth living? And in the Christian religion this fact of "immortality" becomes (though still girt about with much necessary mystery for finite minds) a stimulus and hope of great motive power and consolatory influence. Mr. Sully seems to me to make a misleading statement when he says that "the thought of a more than counterbalancing good in a future state may, no doubt, if we are capable of a persistent imagination of the remote, help us to bear our present misery, but it does not make this misery one whit less real." When we are "helped to bear" a present uncomfortable condition of things, it surely makes the discomfort, and the perplexity attendant on it, less. And the idea of "a future life" need not be estimated as chronologically remote, for it is connected with a spiritual world which encompasses us, into which we may be at any moment transferred. The modern watchwords of "Progress" and "Evolution" are of very attenuated moral worth as motive, if Death ends all, and if there is not really in store an Ideal Good to which the world-process is being conducted. In the Christian Scriptures a personal hope of

immortality is the crown, and in some sort the interpreter, of the optimistic view of the Hebrew prophets concerning the future of the world under a righteous, manifested Theocracy. But the goal of the personal hope and of the hope concerning the world at large is still the same—a perfected life in a purified Universe.

23. "Philosophy," then, like "Science," terminates in "Religion." And by means of the Christian religion we secure an optimism to which we can hold fast,—not a flimsy, superficial, or one-sided theory, denying or ignoring the fact of evil, but a sobered, practical optimism; in the strength of which, men can hope on, and work on, confident that although man is strangely *πλημμελής*, sin, which is the only essential evil, is abnormal, and that the end and final cause of the created Universe is Harmony; not "the primitive harmony of the Unconscious" (a lame and impotent conclusion, which makes life and the world an illusive passage from nothing to nothing!) but the divine harmony spoken of by Paul of Tarsus when he says that God shall be all in all. He who holds this before him as the *terminus ad quem* of all hope and effort can never cease to be a "practical optimist."

24. For "practical optimism" is not a complacent setting aside of effort. It is, to quote Mr. Sully's words again, not "the unqualified optimism" which makes "a mere rosy image of life," and "tends to paralyse the loftier and more arduous varieties of human effort," but it is a view of life, and of the course of the world, which asserts that "life is as good as it can be, *provided we make the best of it.*"

THE CHAIRMAN (Mr. D. Howard, V.P.C.S.—I am sure all will accord the Author their best thanks for this paper;—it is a curious phenomenon of the progress of science and education that such a paper as this, containing a clear and distinct exposition of the real facts of the case with regard to optimism and pessimism, should be needed, and should indeed be regarded as a matter of great practical importance at the present day; and yet, so it is. No doubt, in some cases, the result of our boasted science is to go back to the old longing for *nirvana*, as if the last hope which the nineteenth century can give is an escape from life as from an evil intolerable to those who have to endure it, although it be but a mere phantom with no real existence; and yet, when we study the writings of those who adopt these ideas, we see that they are all put forward in the name of science; but how scientific men can refuse, as these do, to take due cognisance of the facts of science I cannot conceive. Who, let me ask, are the pessimists of the present day? Buddhism, we know, is a pessimism of the most advanced type; but is it the most miserable who are the

Buddhists? There is plenty of misery here in London, and it is certainly not the Buddhist who is most miserable. These pessimistic views are the luxury of the rich, of the very affected and the very pampered class of Sybarites, who consider indulgence in pessimism a matter of enjoyment. It strikes us as a strange and curious phenomenon to witness these things, and one can but wonder how on earth such people are not practical optimists; they love life only too well, and yet they like to make us believe that they hold the pessimistic view of existence. To many of us, it is a startling thing to remember that such an exposition as we find in this paper is really needed. Hartmann confessed that Christianity is "The best consolation of the poor and wretched," and so it really is; and if we study the life-history of the inhabitants of London, we shall certainly find that now, as at all times, it is the idle, the rich, and the luxurious who are the pessimists, while the poor and miserable, to whom eighteen hundred years ago the gospel of Christ was given, are those who regard it as their chief hope and blessing.

Captain FRANCIS PETRIE, F.G.S. (Hon. Sec.).—Among the letters received from those unable to be present this evening is one from Dr. Harold Browne, Bishop of Winchester, who says:—"I have read Canon Saumarez Smith's paper with great interest. I think it very able and good."

Mr. P. VERNON SMITH.—I do not think it possible to express a different opinion from that which has been put before us in the very able and interesting paper which we have just had the privilege of hearing. Consequently, what remains to be said must, like the remarks which have fallen from our Chairman, be merely in illustration of what the lecturer has put before us. Proceeding on that line, I would venture to call the attention of the members of this Institute to a passage that was brought to my recollection by glancing at the paper before I came here. It is contained in a book, entitled *Reasonable Apprehensions and Reassuring Hints*. Among the "apprehensions" with which the author deals is one which he says must strike everybody as being put forward as an objection to Christianity by all who look at the problem apart from Revelation. He asks, "Can man from nature arrive at any definite conclusions, any trustworthy indications, as to the disposition, the benevolence, or the malevolence of the Creator towards the creatures of His hand?" This question must, I think, bear very clearly on the question of optimism or pessimism, because if we admit a Creator, and if He be a benevolent Creator, we must take up the optimistic view; but if, on the other hand, He is a malevolent Creator, we must suppose the state of things He has created to be otherwise than optimistic.

Canon W. SAUMAREZ SMITH.—I am very much obliged to those who have spoken in regard to the line of thought I have followed in my paper. The quotation of my cousin, Mr. Vernon Smith, was very apt and remarkable, and what our Chairman said at the beginning of the discussion was very much in illustration of the ineradicable truth which resides in the contest between persons who are either pessimists or not. I think I may say that

the adage about the tendency of bad things towards good really embraces almost all that has been said. We have seen this in nature, and in the lessons we are able to draw from our own experience, as well as in those we have derived from the Hebrew and subsequent revelations. I refer to the proverb, *mors janua vitæ*—death is the portal of life.

The Meeting was then adjourned.