

The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

Editor: DR. PAUL CARUS.

Associates: { E. C. HEGELER.
MARY CARUS.

VOL. XXII. (No. 10.) OCTOBER, 1908.

NO. 629.

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K'UNG TZE'S PARABLE ON MODERATION. •
By Murata Tanryô.

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“GOD HAS NO OPPOSITE.”

A SERMONETTE FROM THE PERSIAN.

BY PROF. LAWRENCE H. MILLS, D.D.

WE have all of us noticed that ideas develop not so much in circles as in spirals. We find the old thoughts coming again, as history unfolds itself, but they always reappear increased. This is perhaps as apparent as anywhere in the familiar argument by which we try to harmonize for ourselves the blemishes which we observe everywhere in our personal destiny and in that of others—that is to say, in the argument by which we accept these miseries on the score of antithesis.

Hegel, and Fichte before him, used this procedure more fully than others among moderns; but devout clergy whose religion no longer includes a cold acquiescence in human sufferings have often urged upon their hearers as a consolation the necessity of evil to the development of the good, of sorrow to the possibility of happiness.

Obvious, however, as such thoughts may be, and vital as they certainly seem to all men in their attempts to smooth out the wrinkles on the face of things, we little expect to find them expressed to a nicety at such a time as the thirteenth century, and in such a place as Persia; and it is equally startling to find their very detail worked out in a style which reminds us of the much-praised but sometimes belittled philosopher of Stuttgart.¹ The *Masnavi* is the Bible of the Persians, and *Jelal u-din Rumi* is their apostle of the prophet. No book of antiquity, or modern days, is, all things considered more remarkable than this production. Wit, humor, poetry and rhyme express its sometimes post-prandial pantheism, and these

¹ Hegel was born in Stuttgart, where a marble slab bearing his name is set in the facing of the house which claims to be his birthplace.

are offset with conceptions which are often sublime, and a piety which was doubtless sincere. When he comes to philosophical hair-splittings in the style of the mystics he is very acute, although, as he himself confesses, he often sews himself up. On this matter of antithesis he is especially rich, and he gives us in many a place "Hegelianism before Hegel." Here is a bit of his doctrine of "limit."

"Errors occur not without some truth. If there were no truth, how could error exist? Truth is the Night of Power hidden among other nights in order to try the spirit of every night. Not every night is that Night of Power, nor yet is every one devoid of power. If there were no bad goods in the world every fool might be a buyer, for the hard act of judging would be easy; and if there were no faults one man could judge as well as another. If all were faulty, where would be the skill? If all wood were common, where would be the aloes? He who accepts everything is silly, and he who says that all is false is a knave. . . .

"Discern form from substance, O son, as lion from desert. When thou seest the waves of speech, know that there is an ocean beneath them. Every moment the world and we are renewed. Life is like a stream renewed and ever renewed (compare Hegel's "All is flow" as borrowed from Heraclitus). It, life, wears the appearance of continuity of form; the seeming continuity arises from the very swiftness of the motion (p. 3.); a spark whirled round has the appearance of a circle."²

He expresses the principle of this on page 31 of book I. Here he begins and slowly works his way up to a statement so great as nearly to silence us with respect for him. Commencing with the usual instance of "light and color," he goes on; "and so with mental colors. At night there is no light, and so no color, but by this we know what light is, by darkness. Opposite shows up opposite as the white man the negro; the opposite of light shows us what is light; hence colors are known by their opposites. *God created pain and grief to show happiness through its opposite.*³ Hidden things are manifested thus." And then come the (to a scholastic) magnificent words, "*God has no opposite: He remains hidden.*" God has no opposite; He is all-inclusive. We are all of us a little pantheistic nowadays, although on Hegel's law we may still claim to be orthodox; and who that thinks has not been, or will not be, mentally

² Compare book II, p. 165. I have not followed Mr. Wynfield's most impressive and effective translation literally, but I have preferred it to others.

³ The italics are mine.

moved by the conception of that inclusiveness, "He has no opposite?"

All that exists exists through His will, and has ever so existed. The discoveries of physical science, the still more far-reaching ones of the purely mental, only define his indefinableness, and make Him greater.

He has no opposite, not in the realms of the moral idea, not in the close distinctions of the exact or the *quasi* exact sciences, not in the physical astrologies of the skies, not in the range of mathematics surpassing imagination, nor in the scope of esthetics which are as minute as they are expanded. The telescope and the microscope are as powerless as is that world of sensibility which is called into life by music or color. Nowhere is He arrested or described. Sorrow cannot say to Him "Here is your limit," nor Pain declare "Me you never made." Even the old conceptions of future torment which exist clear and distinct as ideas, at least, almost as dreadful as the supposed realities; nothing, nothing is without Him, or so opposed as to define Him; He has no opposite. But He has detail, if we might so express ourselves. He has no opposite, but His actual deeds and attributes are made up of them. He can never be defined, but we can approach a definition. Every opposite that we discover brings Him nearer. All the thronging results of science may be said to be the discoveries of opposites. Every opposite found out by brain, or eye, or glass, or measure, every tool with its adapted edge, every structure in the subdivisions of mechanics is an added item in the rearing of that great edifice made up of differences out of which we approach Him. Without the recognition of difference no consciousness can exist, and the pang of misery is the actual condition to the thrill of rapture as to the calm of peace.

Surely it is a consoling as well as an impressive thought to the *thinker*, that notwithstanding the conflicts in his mental processes he does not think in vain, that to the universe of opposites on which he works there is a unity towards which he may indefinitely progress.⁴ "God has no opposite"; it gives consolation to the *doer*, for he knows that every result which he brings forth, sharply facing either menace or defect, brings him nearer to the Harmonized. Well may we accept the "pulse of thought," "the grasp," "the split," "the combination."⁵ What consolation above all it gives the *sufferer*! How oppositions tend to make us doubt! How can there be a purpose in so much

⁴ Compare Kant's "*Ad Indefinitum*." (Was it, however, an unconscious joke?)

⁵ Compare Hegel's "*Begriff, Urtheil, Schluss*."

treason, such equivocation, and such oppression as we see? How is it possible that there can be anything so mean? Surely here, if anywhere, is God's Opposite.—Yet even here the old Persian's word holds good. God means the caitiff as the only being that can define the good. That good is somewhere, and all of us will be sure some day to find it out. God has no opposite, and He perhaps never makes us more acutely sensitive to His Goodness than when He permits us to recoil and with disgust from what seems the contradictory opposite of all that He can be.