

## THE SANITY OF OPTIMISM

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"For our conversation is in heaven." - Phil. 3:20

A GERMAN philosopher of the school of Schöpenhauer would define optimism as the effort of a foolish man to prove the existence of good in an essentially evil world. Some assert that an optimist is a man who is too cowardly to face conditions as they really are. Therefore, he says, "All is good," much as a boy whistles on his way through a dark forest in order to convince himself that he is not afraid.

According to others, "Optimism is a foolish attempt to ignore facts, making men effeminate, and women more silly than they naturally are." Life, we are told, is a serious problem and not a vaudeville performance; hence, we should expect painful experiences and meet them with fortitude.

This sort of optimism, however, is seen only through the colored lens of pessimism. Such views are the dark clouds of human reason which obscure the stars, the suns and the moon of the celestial universe, and lead one to believe that evil is everywhere, and that good is non-existent. They are the fogs at sea which delude men into thinking that they are doomed to perpetual darkness, to which they must submit with more or less stoical indifference. If a disciple of Schöpenhauer is told that all clouds will pass away, he immediately answers, "But they will gather again." He refuses to be comforted, and pities one for his credulity.

Optimism is regarded by some as the assumption of a gaiety which is not felt, and therefore a form of hypocrisy. It may be honest to reveal our emotions, depressions and discouragements to everyone we meet, but in order to be considered sincere should one forever carry his heart on his coat sleeve for the birds to peck at?

Humanity is divided into three classes: [1] those who bore everybody to death without helping themselves; [2] those who keep their troubles to themselves until consumed by them; and [3] those who live superior to them through spiritual understanding. The true optimist is comforted in his distresses by his belief in an invisible Presence which assures him that all is well, even when all seems to be otherwise, while in every shadow the pessimist sees a hideous and threatening reality.

We are continually exaggerating the size of the cloud and depreciating the value of the silver lining. We "look for the best," yet expect the worst. If a teacher tells a boy that the principal wishes to see him, it invariably causes a feeling of apprehension. That the principal might wish to confer a favor upon him rarely occurs to his mind. Grown men and women feel a sense of fear at the ring of the telephone or the doorbell. Letters and telegrams are opened with trembling fingers because of an unexplainable dread of their contents. If these occurrences were rare, we might put them down to personal idiosyncrasies; but it is safe to say that the vast majority have experienced at some time or other these sensations, so it would seem that there is a common, as well as an individual tendency toward pessimism.

When the individual would live the constructive life by rising above pessimism, he discovers that there is a pressure from the race thought, against which he must contend. He starts out in the morning with the determination to look on the bright side of things when almost the first person he meets calls his attention to some negative or discouraging condition. He listens to an account of yesterday's atrocities until his blood curdles and his anger rises. His good resolution has disappeared on the stream of popular indignation, and he concludes that it were impossible to be an optimist in a world of such constant calamity. Admitting the deeds of violence that men do, are there not other acts which entitle them to our admiration?

A story is told of a wounded Highlander who was brought from the front to an English hospital. Among his possessions was a German helmet with which he was unwilling to part. Those who saw the trophy concluded that the man who had once been its owner had been the victim of Sandy's prowess in combat; but the wounded soldier told a different story - one which reveals that not even the horrors of war can destroy the Christ in the consciousness of men. Both men had been wounded in the same engagement. Cut off from all communication, these companions in misery spoke through the eyes their one common language, and knew that they belonged to the one common brotherhood. Crawling closer to each other, Sandy bound up the German's wounds, who in turn sought to alleviate Sandy's sufferings. In telling the story, he said, "An' I gied him my bonnet, ye ken, and he lauched, and he grippet my han'; and then gied me his helmet; and it came to my mind, 'Here's a trophy,' thocht I, 'of a new-fangled kind.' I dressit his wound, and he dressit mine. No' a word could we speak, the one tae the ither; but though he was a German, I ken him as a brother."

Pessimism would insist on the intrinsic badness of men; optimism would enlarge on their essential goodness. Philosophers speak of a "foolish" optimism, but this is far better than a wise pessimism. The learned pessimist who tells us that we live in a world of chance and change, and consequent uncertainty, is not nearly so helpful or encouraging as the unlearned optimist who comforts us with the assurance that Law and Order prevail; for no matter how often ignorant men turn the world upside down, God will turn it right side up again. All we are asked to do is to believe this and joyously expect the desired event.

In nothing is our pessimism more frequently shown than in our conversation. In a moment of illumination, a man declares that he will hold his tongue forever if he cannot talk encouragingly; but presently finds himself contributing to the world's woes by dilating upon them.

We are slaves of habit, and the habit of talking destructively is one of the most persistent. One of the first signs of a man's acceptance of Truth is seen in a changed manner of conversation. This is a change on the moral plane, and as such indicates a spiritual awakening. There is a higher plane, however, on which conversation becomes constructive. It is of this plane that Paul is speaking when he says, "Our conversation is in heaven." What does he mean by this? If our conception of heaven be that of a place beyond the skies, such conversation would be a physical impossibility. But if heaven be a state of mind, as we are being persuaded that it is, we can understand that this heavenly conversation is one in which the subjects of sin, sickness, sorrow and poverty have no place. In heaven - on this plane of spiritual knowing, and the bliss which accompanies it - there is no consciousness of anything but the things of God.

It all depends on where we live, as to what subjects we shall find to talk about. Almost invariably, we talk along lines with which we are most identified, in mind and perception. If we

live mainly on the plane of the physical, our conversation will be confined to the physical. If we dwell on the plane of the esthetic, we will talk of the beauty in art, music, literature or nature. In like manner, if we soar to the realm of Spirit, we will comprehend the mystical language of that world. Just as the people of different lands speak tongues which are unintelligible to each other, so does the language of one plane of consciousness differ from that of the other.

When Saul of Tarsus became Paul of God, he spoke in a "new tongue," and soon he discovered that he had become a foreigner among those who had been his best and most intimate friends. Yet he knew that, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

When a man's conversation is in heaven, it is naturally connected with the fruits of the Spirit, and we are told that the "fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance; against such there is no law."

Pessimism is the natural consequence of living on the plane of the senses. It is the unavoidable result of looking to materiality for happiness. Optimism is that state of the soul which, perceiving the Allness of God, maintains its serenity and invites the things of Good. It is neither assumed nor forced. It is not the result of will-power, but the result of understanding.

We see a man who has always tried to take a cheerful view of things. He has tried to reason himself out of his fears and apprehensions by purely intellectual processes. He has willed to be happy, but his happiness, born of will-power, has been more or less spasmodic and irregular. Then he glimpses the Truth of Being, by which he learns that Spirit is the only Reality, and God the only Good. He walks and works in one world, but lives and thinks in another, and it is these thoughts that externalize themselves in terms of happiness and health. He no longer contends against outward conditions, but against inward misconceptions. He knows that "All things work together for good to them that love God."

When a man learns that back of all misleading appearances there is eternal Law and Order, he rests in this conviction. He thinks and speaks in the language of Spirit, and just as in the bright lexicon of Youth there is no such word as "fail," so in the dictionary of God there is no such word as sin, sickness or sorrow. In God's great dictionary only those words which express Life: Joy, Beauty, Health, Holiness, can be found.

As we grow in spiritual knowledge, negative terms become obsolete. Our vocabulary extends itself in the direction of constructive terminology, and all that is not harmony therewith is cast off. Our conversation is in heaven whenever we talk in terms of Life and Love, Health and Happiness. It is in hell whenever we talk in terms of death and hate; sin and sickness; impurity and impotency. The insanity of pessimism is seen in the lives of those who indulge in it. The sanity of optimism is mirrored in the smiling countenance, the confident outlook upon life, and the enjoyment of it.

Pessimism would exclude God from His own universe. Optimism would exclude all that is unlike God. It is what Professor James calls, "The Religion of Healthy-mindedness." Optimism is the microscope by which we perceive the pearl of blessing in every experience. It is the art of magnifying our benefactions and minimizing our anxieties. If the optimist in a seeming world of evil says, "All is good," it is because he knows that all is good. The Allness of God is not a

meaningless phrase; it is a mathematical truth. When it is once grasped, it is the staff upon which to lean; a spring of water in a sandy desert; a shadow of a great rock in a sun-baked wilderness.

The optimist does not ignore appearances. He sees through them to that Eternal Law and Order which is the same yesterday, today and forever. He is not terrified to stand on Divine Principle. He knows that there is nothing true but God, so he says with Paul, "None of these things move me."

Would you be an optimist? Then watch the door of your mind and "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."