

A Blighting Curse

by J.D. Buch, F.T.S.

Reprinted from "Theosophical Siftings" Volume 4

The Theosophical Publishing Society, England

"The morality which flows from scientific materialism, may be comprehended within these few words: ' Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.'

All noble thoughts are but vain dreams, the effusions of automata with two arms, running about on two legs, which, being finally decomposed into chemical atoms, combine themselves anew, resembling the dance of lunatics in a madhouse".

PROFESSOR RUDOLPH WAGNER

" There have at all times been great philosophers holding such, or similar opinions, who nevertheless were neither fools, robbers, assassins, nor desperadoes ".

" We must finally be permitted to leave all questions about morality and utility out of sight". ..

DR. LOUIS BÜCHNER

SCIENTIFIC materialism is not a crime, nor are its advocates necessarily criminals. Whether materialism can in any just sense be called either scientific or philosophical, a deeper science and a broader philosophy reveal the fact, that the conclusions of materialism are the greatest misfortune that can overtake an individual.

If those who glory in the title of "scientific materialists" would confine themselves strictly to physical investigations and to speculations about matter and force on the physical plane, they might indeed "be permitted to leave all questions about morality and utility out of sight". They may, indeed, assert the "immortality" and the "infinity" of both matter and force; the "dignity" of matter, and the "immutability of the Laws of Nature", but when in the same connection they treat of "free-will", "the heavens", the "seat of the soul" — to them a non-entity — and of kindred subjects, they may not "finally be permitted to leave all questions about morality and utility out of sight", for this is equivalent to saying that they will treat of "morals", and claim exemption from all moral accountability; and of "utility," without being held responsible for the grossest *misuse* of the very powers they invoke. Again, this is not a crime, nor are those who indulge in such literary gymnastics necessarily criminals. Such a course can only arise from mental obliquity and moral blindness. Even the claim of such individuals, that they are engaged solely in the pursuit of truth, and for its own sake, furnishes no sufficient reason for their conclusions. Having arrived at certain results, the materialist assumes that these conclusions are true; and so they may be to him, and the highest truths of which his own limited understanding is capable. A fair degree of modesty might convince him of the possibility that other minds, quite as logically constructed as his own, and with possibly far wider ranges of both experience [Page 13] and reasoning, might come to very different conclusions. When, therefore, the materialist claims for himself the pursuit of truth for its own sake, that he has come to certain conclusions that are true, and that none others are or can be either rational or

possible, he must be held strictly to both "morality and utility". No man living in a world inhabited by human beings can altogether get rid of moral accountability. Even the chemist in his laboratory, who discovers a new explosive, is held morally and legally responsible if he puts his discovery into the hands of idiots or children. One may himself refrain from committing crimes, and yet either ignorantly or wilfully promote criminal practices in others. One may also be guilty of moral obliquity that is patent to everyone but himself. So-called scientific materialism is a moral obliquity of just this character. That the materialist can himself come to no other conclusions may be true, and it may be a misfortune far greater than physical blindness. But what right has he to assume that all other human beings are also blind, and that the glorious orb of day is not only invisible, but does not exist, because he fails to see it. The practice of belittling the powers and denying the testimony of other investigators, for the sole reason that their conclusions differ from our own, belongs in a very high degree to the *un*-scientific Nihilist.

The real point at issue concerns the limits of the "unknowable" or the thither boundaries of that which man may know. Concerning this limit there is no universal experience, for the simple reason, that no two individuals possess the requisite powers to investigate in an equal degree. There may, indeed, by comparison be derived an *average experience*, above and below which the exceptions will gather.

The law of evolution now generally admitted in its cruder form by these materialists, has a logical sequence generally overlooked. This sequence means, if evolution means anything but a convenient slogan against the theologians, that there is no necessary or known limit to the unfolding of the powers of man; whether these powers be analytically or synthetically considered. The presumption is therefore rather stupendous for an average individual to assume the eternity and immutability of the laws of Nature, to advocate evolution as one of these universal laws, and at the same time virtually to claim that he has himself completed the evolutionary possibilities of his race! After this it need not surprise us that materialists of the B,chner stamp should claim for their utterances immunity from moral accountability and utility.

So long as materialism does not invoke moral responsibility, it need not be raised by the opponents of Nihilism. If, however, an appeal unto Caesar is taken, a sufficient answer may also be made before that august tribunal.

The trouble with materialism does not consist in its postulates of the [Page 14] eternity and infinity of both matter and force, the persistence of motion, or the universality and immutability of the laws of Nature. The trouble originates in the *denial* of the existence of powers, potencies and possibilities concerning which it confessedly knows nothing. It is, therefore, a sufficient answer to such denial, that it is illogical, unscientific, and unphilosophical. Taking, therefore, whatsoever appeal he may, the materialist is brought to confusion in his own house.

Let us first consider the charge that so-called scientific materialism is illogical.

It is illogical first; from insufficient data as entering into such investigations, and as to the real grounds for so-called scientific knowledge.

Insufficient data are manifest from the fact that what is called "mind", considered as a function of the brain, either ignores or belittles the fact and the phenomena of consciousness; the gap between mind, considered as the physiology of the brain being, as Prof. Tyndall says, "unthinkable". Either consciousness is ignored, or this "unthinkable" gap is ignored. Consciousness is therefore considered in terms of "mind and matter," so that which is simply related, is considered as practically identical — and this is warranted neither by experience nor by logic.

The ground upon which is supposed to rest all scientific knowledge, is first, the evidence of the senses; second, logical reasoning upon facts so derived; and third, conclusions or conjectures (hypotheses) based upon experience. Whenever a considerable preponderance of evidence justified by sound reasoning supports the hypothesis, a law of nature is believed to be discerned. The result of this process is considered to be positive or "scientific" knowledge. Such an hypothesis lies at the very foundation of the scientific concept of the constitution of matter, and beyond this hypothesis, science has as yet made no advance, though the idea of the atomic constitution of matter fails in accounting for all the facts of experience, even as evidenced by the senses. At all events, the house of the scientists is divided against itself at this point.

That supreme authority claimed in some quarters for the dicta of science is justified neither by experience nor by the foundations upon which it is supposed to rest. Experience has shown again and, again that neither individual scientists nor so-called scientific bodies are always above prejudice. They have not only pre-judged many questions, but, owing to pre-conceived ideas and blind prejudice, have often thrown cases out of scientific court and refused to in any way examine testimony, because it seemed to conflict with their dicta. The cases of Von Reichenbach and Mesmer may serve as illustrations in the face of the present "scientific" craze over the same group of facts under the new name, hypnotism.

It is not, however, the purpose to enter into a detailed discussion of [Page 15] materialism at this time, but rather to point out its effects on individual evolution.

It is a well-known principle in modern physiology that the exercise of an organ determines its development, and its harmonious relations to the structure of which it is a part.

Through disuse from whatsoever cause, rudimentary organs may result from progressive atrophy; or such organs may remain rudimentary from the early life of the organism from lack of exercise. This principle is admitted in all cases where the use of a given organ has been in any way determined. In the case of the brain, however, we have an organ, the intimate structure, relations, and functions of which are imperfectly known. The wisest physiologists admit very readily, in the presence of the little that is experimentally and actually known, a great deal that is barely conjecture, and still a great deal concerning which they really know nothing. It is generally claimed that the brain is the organ of the mind, the seat of sensation, the co-ordinating centre of muscular motion, and the centre of consciousness, while the exact relation of sensation and thought to consciousness is admittedly unknown. In other words, all that are known are certain structures, functions, and relations in the manifestation of sensation, thought, and consciousness, and these only in part. In the presence of these facts, it is unscientific to claim that unknown relations do not exist, and that other manifestations than those already recognised may not occur; and yet this claim is frequently made and designated as scientific.

On the physical plane, in the world of phenomena cognizable by the five senses, it is true that we know nothing of matter without force; of force without matter; and may logically deduce the persistence of motion, the correlation of force, the eternity of both matter and force *in some form*, and the immutability of the laws of nature. It may also be logically declared, that in relation to this same world of phenomena, there is no manifestation of mind or consciousness except through the brain. These are, indeed, general concepts of science, warranted by experience, and supported by sound reason. But on the other hand, in the face of the admission of the probable refinement of matter beyond anything known on the physical plane, it is positively or virtually declared, that with this refinement, relations and manifestations entirely unknown to us may not also occur; such declaration is both illogical and unscientific. In the absence of any real knowledge on the subject, all that can be declared is, that, reasoning by analogy from the known to the unknown, the *probabilities* are so, and so. This would be a "logical inference". It would also be a logical inference that, considering the law of evolution, and the marked difference in the degree of unfoldment of intelligence among individuals, [Page 16] there *may* be those who are quite familiar with the refinement of matter, referred to, which is unknown to us experimentally, and that these same individuals may have evolved faculties enabling them to apprehend the relations and manifestations of this refined matter beyond anything known to us. Such a logical inference would simply await empirical demonstration. In place of any such logical inference, the materialist is often both illogical and conceited enough to admit the further refinement of matter, and the law of evolution, and to deny the possibility of powers and experiences beyond the range of his own narrow vision.

Bearing in mind the physiological principle already referred to, *viz.*, the atrophy of an organ for lack of use where the organ already exists in a rudimentary form, what must be the effect on the further evolution of the higher faculties of so-called materialistic Nihilism? Admitting the principle of evolution and that man is far from a perfectly developed being, to set his face squarely and deliberately against the exercise of his higher reason and intuitions, and to stolidly maintain that no higher faculties are possible to him than those that he shares with the brutes, and has derived from the animal world, must certainly give rise to a Nihilism that is far more than theoretical. Such a process means for the individual, first the atrophy of the higher faculties, and finally their destruction. Among educated people, born under favouring stars, with all the benefits of inherited spiritual tendencies, the outcome of this Nihilism need not in a single life result in the production of "fools, robbers, assassins, nor desperadoes." With another class of individuals, however, of equal intelligence and unequal opportunities and moral restraints, the blighting result may be, and often is, more directly and immediately apparent and disastrous.

Whenever man sets himself thus to annul his higher faculties, and to destroy his chances of higher evolution, he invites a blighting curse; *viz.*, the utter annihilation of his own soul.

The question of moral responsibility is based on the intelligence of the individual. Without opening up the question of innate ideas and free will, it may be safely stated that beyond those faculties which man shares in common with the animal world, his intellectual, moral, and spiritual advancement depend largely on his own endeavour. No amount of scientific or other knowledge, as such, is necessarily elevating. All depends in this direction on motive and use. The higher the function, the more does its development and elevation depend on individual effort. The reason for this may be found in the fact, that the higher faculties, like the psychic and spiritual, involve wider areas and are therefore less automatic. This is particularly the case in regard to intuition, which differs from intellection as universals differ from particulars. The mental pictures through the agency of the human brain, reproduce the world about us to [Page 17] consciousness. It can readily be shown that the structure, function, growth, and development of

the brain, hair, as a foundation, are those geometrical principles as to form, and those mathematical principles as to number, motions, and relations, that, as immutable laws produce and govern the universe. A reasoning brain is a mathematical instrument; built upon mathematical principles; and governed by mathematical laws. Otherwise, what definite relations could there be between the brain and its functions, and a mathematically constructed universe ? This fact, important as it is, and grand beyond all empiricism, by no means explains the *fact* of consciousness. It does, however, explain the relations of the organ of consciousness to the external world.

As a function of the individual, intuition is a synthesis of all other functions, sensations and faculties. It may be figured to the mind as hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, and feeling, exercised coincidentally and simultaneously. It is more than this; for it also involves all reminiscences; all present perceptions, combined with all past experiences. Intuition is to individual life what sunlight is to the growing plant. It woos it out from its prison-house of clay, and gently draws it up into the light of day. Thus wooed into life, the plant turns toward the sun by an impulse that it cannot resist. To deny to man all range of action beyond the ordinary exercise of the five senses is to limit all possible evolution to the physical plane. It can easily be demonstrated by experiment that in a very large number of persons in almost every community, there exist already the germs of higher faculties, and in a smaller number of persons these faculties are more highly developed, and give rise to unusual and very remarkable manifestations. The out-and-out materialist is in the habit of flatly and persistently denying all such facts and phenomena; or, admitting such occurrences, to attribute them wholesale to fraud or self-deception. The materialist maintains this attitude with such pertinacity, and treats all such occurrences with such contemptuousness as to for ever exclude from his own mind any possibility of conviction, be the evidence what it may. He thus voluntarily arrests his own evolution and deliberately sets himself toward atavism. In order to maintain this position with some show of reason, he scornfully resents the suggestion that any individual possesses faculties or intuitions that he does not share, and he assails both the general intelligence and truthfulness of all who, possessing the higher intuitions, testify as to their existence and use. I am not the least concerned for those who recognize and exercise the higher faculties; nor are they in the least disturbed by the assaults and denials of the Nihilists. I am pleading with the materialist for *himself*, and would beg of him not to deliberately commit *spiritual suicide*.

While these higher faculties transcend the bodily senses, they are, [Page 18] nevertheless, very definitely related to them, and governed by the same general laws. Suppose that by some freak we were to deny that we had any muscular system, and to utterly refuse to make the least motion or exertion whatever; what would be the effect in time on the muscular system ? Every tyro in philosophy or pathology knows that the result would be muscular atrophy. The supernumerary and the idle organ or faculty share the same fate. Use not only determines development but existence as well.

Materialism is therefore illogical when it announces the principle of evolution as one of the immutable laws of Nature, and then proceeds to limit or annul it. Materialism is unscientific when it denies the possible existence of anything beyond the range of its own perceptions, and deliberately sets its face to deny facts that would be troublesome to its theories if once admitted.

That which is both illogical and unscientific can never be philosophical because the logic of events is the golden thread of philosophy.

Materialism is a Blighting Curse because it is deliberate self-destruction. If there could enter into the conception of the embryo-materialist the possibility that there is one chance, however remote, that man has a soul that survives the body, the materialist by his own act destroys that chance. Very many who claim to be agnostics, are unconscious materialists and are doing just this, for the reason that supreme indifference is but one remove from downright denial.

It may be urged that the materialist is honest in his convictions, and that he is led to them by a logic that he cannot resist, and that therefore he can come to no other conclusions. It is also urged by materialists of the Buchner stamp that annihilation is a painless process, and that an eternal sleep in which no dreams can come, is rather to be desired than shunned. Both these propositions are delusions and snares. No one ever came to the conclusions referred to without a struggle, in which the voice of the soul had to be often silenced. This voice of the soul is the pleading of the God *in man*, by virtue of which indwelling divinity only he has been enabled to reach the human plane. One who puts aside this pleading voice within as a foolish sentimentality, may in time silence it altogether. The Atman may thus take its everlasting flight, leaving an animal soul in a human body.

Annihilation may be far from that painless process that some would have us think. The upward climb by evolution is a tedious and painful process, as it all depends on actual experience, not on mere theory. Man has passed through all lower phases of life by actual experience to reach the higher plane, and in no other way can he reach the higher plane. He who "progresses backward" and through vice descends [Page 19] toward the animal plane, suffers even more than in the ascent. In the one instance his Augoeïdes is an inspiring spirit that urges him onward and upward. In the other, it is an accusing angel that stings him as with a whip of scorpions.

These results are not at once manifest in intellectual Nihilism, and may only appear in the next or succeeding incarnation. In the meantime, a good inheritance and a fortunate environment may prevent the materialist from being either a "fool, a robber, an assassin, or a desperado". Where there are no aspirations beyond the plane of the senses, there can be little devachanic life, and reincarnations may occur rapidly.

A very considerable tendency in this direction is everywhere manifest, and is by no means absent from the Christian churches. Spirituality being dead, or obscured by mammon worship, the name of Jesus Christ has become a mere fetish, and one is a good Christian now-a-days who performs the proper genuflection at the mention of His name, however little of the genuine spirit of Christ may be manifest in their lives.

There may thus be discerned an almost universal tendency for the human race through this wide-spread-materialism to precipitate itself head-long to destruction.

No mere intellectual assent to the idea of the existence and immortality of the soul will be found sufficient for the soul's progress towards liberty and light; any more than a like assent to the existence of the muscles would make one an athlete. Following the admission of the idea must come a ceaseless striving, a continual warfare. The kingdom of heaven must be taken by violence — by effort, by self-denial. The higher intuitions can unfold only as the lower nature is subdued, for it is thus by conquering earth that

man wins heaven.

He who relinquishes the quest and denies all possible progress, who refuses to try, and sneers at those who try continually, is but inviting a blighting curse and doing all he can to involve others in his own destruction.

**EXTRACTS FROM THE
"NERALAMBA UPANISHAD OF SUKLA-YAJUR-VEDA"**

as published in "The Theosophist", April, 1890
and reproduced in "Theosophical Siftings" Volume 4

What is Happiness?

It is the remaining in (or enjoying of) the supreme bliss, having cognised through experience the form (or reality) of Sachithananda (or that which is Be-ness, consciousness and bliss).

What is Sorrow (or misery)?

It is the thinking about the objects of sense (pertaining to mundane existence) and is the opposite of happiness.

What is Swarga (heaven)?

It is the society of Sat (either good men or the union of one's soul with Brahma which is Sat).

What is Naraka (hell)?

It is the association with that which brings about this mundane existence which is Asat (false).

What is Bhandha (bondage)?

Such conceptions as "I was born"; arising from the affinities (or force) of Agyana (non-wisdom), which has no beginning, form the bondage (of Atma).

The thoughts proceeding from Agyana about the mundane objects and producing the conception of "It is mine", in such as father, mother, wife, child, brother, lands and house, form the bondage.

The egoistic conceptions of actor, etc., are bondage.

The aspiring for the development in oneself of the eight (higher psychical powers, such as (anima), laghima and others is bondage.

The desire of propitiating the favor of the Devas, men, etc., is bondage.

The desire of going through the eight means of yoga practice, Yama, etc., is bondage.

The desire of performing the duties of one's own caste and order of life is bondage.

The thought that command, fear and doubt are the qualities of (or do pertain to) Atma is bondage.

The thoughts concerning the knowledge and performance of sacrifices, penances, austerity and gift is bondage. Even in the desire of Moksha (emancipation) alone there is bondage. By the very act of thought, bondage is caused.

What is Moksha (emancipation)?

Moksha is that state in which through the discrimination of the eternal from the non-eternal, all thoughts relating to the transient mundane existence, and the objects pleasure and pain and all love towards the objects of the world vanish.