# REGENERATION

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# REGENERATION

A REPLY TO

MAX NORDAU

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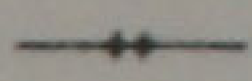

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# REGENERATION

## CHAPTER I

### *WHO IS THE CRITIC?*

VOLTAIRE said that if all the celestial bodies are inhabited, our earth must be the madhouse of the universe. To us who know the era of the great cynic only as recorded by the history of Dryasdusts, and the flippant memoirs and autobiographies of his contemporaries, his biting sarcasm cannot be considered undeserved. But, with regard to our own times, most of us would probably hesitate to brand our present state of culture, our modern civilization, as a fool's paradise.

It is a truism that an historical epoch can only be correctly studied at a distance in time, as the outlines of a mountain can only be studied at a distance in space. The actor in a piece, though intimately acquainted with his own part and the accessories with which he comes in contact, cannot form a just idea of the impression which the play,

with its more or less successful rendering, its scenery, and other spectacular effects, produces on the mind of the average spectator. A super who is ignorant of stage management and of the precise results the manager aims at might deem many things going on behind the stage both foolish and ridiculous. To him the frantic efforts of some actor, or scene-shifter, to produce some ordinary effect might well appear as lunacy.

The judgment we form concerning the time we live in runs a great risk of being biassed by the narrowness of the vista we can command. The interdependence of causes simultaneously at work, the co-operation of impulses active at a great distance, the peculiarities of circumstances surrounding each leading phenomenon, the real intentions of leading characters, secret motives in groups and parties—all this represents so many sealed books to the contemporary to be gradually opened only by future historians.

There are no doubt many facilities ready to hand for the man who in modern times desires to study his own epoch, which were not available in the past. Distances are practically suppressed, the whole of civilized humanity has been placed in intimate connection, a highly developed Press records daily events everywhere in a minute fashion, to the making of books there is no end, and

in every direction an elaborate mechanism is established for the obtaining of rapid and precise information. In fact, the Kammergelehrte, who, like Kant, would study the world-phenomenon without leaving his native town, would in our days stand a better chance of obtaining completer and exacter information than any philosopher before him.

But, despite the quasi-ubiquitousness the modern philosopher enjoys, he would indulge in self-deception were he tempted to believe that he had secured all the data requisite to judge the contemporaries of his race as they act, live, feel, and think during the closing years of this century.

For, against the easy access to information, must be placed the mass of intricate problems that arise with every step of progress, the multitude of ideas which strive for realization, the bewilderment which ensues on crumbling systems and religions, new discoveries, new theories, new and complicated associations of ideas, new and hazy aspirations, sympathies, and yearnings—for all of which words cannot be coined fast enough. Every day we witness political, social, economic, and psychological phenomena, the explanation of which would demand not only an enormous amount of knowledge, but reasoning powers and a freedom from bias seldom blended in one human mind. Facts, circumstances, theories, human actions, and human ideas, change

and intermingle so constantly and so rapidly as to produce bewilderment capable of misleading any philosopher who attempts to gauge them with the instruments of the past and in conformity with the doctrines of the school to which he belongs.

What renders it still more difficult to appraise any epoch, and especially the present one, is the intimate interdependence of all the phenomena to be observed. The idiosyncrasies of a sovereign, or of a minister, influence legislation, legislation influences public institutions, public institutions influence the upper classes, and the upper classes influence the masses. But legislation, institutions, the upper classes and the people are influenced from a great number of other directions, while they again influence the sovereign and the minister. Thus it would be impossible to attribute with accuracy a given number of effects to special causes : for every cause is the effect of another cause, and every effect produces other effects. For instance, art and literature may strongly influence men in power as well as the masses, while no one will deny that men in power, as well as the political and social condition of the masses, exercise a strong influence on art and literature. And then, on the top of it all, —as if worse to confound the confusion of the man with a system, trivial incidents intervene and bring about a new series of causes and effects evidently

destined to operate as long as humanity lasts. So interdependent are the actors in the human drama, so complete is the intricate and sensitive mechanism of causes and effects, and so overcharged with energy are the social dynamos, that any fool, any child, any trivial accident, may move one of the countless points arranged by circumstances, and thus hurl the engine of events in new and dangerous directions.

These, and many other difficulties, encountered by the student of his own time are largely responsible for his opinions, often savouring as much of his idiosyncrasy, his professional and national prejudices as of an independent inquiry. In order to choose between the maze of highways and by-ways, in order to judge whether he be moving forwards, backwards, or in a circle, he gropes for some kind of a compass and naturally clutches at that which his idiosyncrasy proffers. When we therefore meet with an appraiser of his own epoch, it behoves us to bear in mind the standpoint from which he has contemplated the world-phenonemon, and with what bias and prejudice his views have been coloured. The old Greek story of the sandal-maker, who became prejudiced against a work of art because the artist had made a mistake in the arrangement of the sandal-strings, points its moral. The prejudices arising from trade, personal interests, and many other palpable sources are not

difficult to trace and to evade, but where is the man whose views have not been influenced by his nationality, his religion, his favourite science or art, his love, his hatred, or his ambition?

It is to such influences, often considered by the influenced as so many advantages and seldom sufficiently noticed by his critics, that we often owe the apparent profundity and exhaustiveness of an appreciation which in reality is one-sided.

Education, and, still more, an intense study of one special branch of knowledge, rich in important and striking results, naturally tend to strengthen the student's faith and his belief in the capabilities of his favourite science. The brain-cells, influenced by the will, and habitually becoming stimulated by presentations—emanating from the subject on which the student has concentrated his attention—adapt themselves gradually to the perception of such presentations, and by re-acting on other cells render the whole organism disposed to seek such presentations. In plain language, the specialist in one science has a great aptitude for discovering such causes and such effects as his favourite science has best elucidated, while he is tempted to overlook other causes and other effects which may be of equal or greater importance.

The specialist attains to a mastery of his own subject, and often acquires a strong bias regarding

other subjects, because he pursues his inquiries somewhat after the same fashion as the dog follows the scent of the game. By training, the dog is familiar with the smell of the animal pursued, and, bent on following the trail, he pays no attention to any other scents or smells that he encounters in his course. In the same way the specialist rapidly perceives and minutely studies any phenomena, however slight, with which his favourite science has rendered him familiar, while he is apt to disregard phenomena demanding fresh studies and threatening to be inexplicable by investigation confined to the lines which he prefers to follow.

Thus, if a law-student were to write a treatise on our epoch, he would endeavour to show that the jurisprudence, the law, and the courts—in fact, the whole legal mechanism—is the most important feature in our civilization, and that on which progress or retrogression most depends. As remedies for our evils, he would propose simpler, or more complicated forms of procedure, more or less enactments, according to his own idiosyncrasies.

A military man would consider a development on military lines as true progress. He would yearn to draft the whole nation into the army! He would favour universal conscription, as Lord Wolseley does, and might, like Count Moltke, look upon war as a healthy bracing, an epuration, of a race, and as

an indispensable corrective to over-population. He would cite the expansion of the chest in Germany as a proof of the power of military training to further physical development, and would look upon strict military discipline as the means of establishing moral order in a country.

A theologian would point to the immense influence exercised by Christianity upon humanity, and would insist upon the religious aspect of every question, and, like Mr. Drummond, would see in every new discovery a confirmation of his peculiar dogmas. His remedy would be more ritualism, or more liberal doctrines, or more emotion in religion, according to his High Church, Broad Church, or Low Church creed.

Philosophical religionists, like Mr. Benjamin Kidd and others who pin their faith to the development of the altruistic feeling in human beings, would endeavour to reconcile all phenomena under their observation with their theory of social evolution.

If therefore we wish to form a correct judgment of our own time and our own contemporaries, we must not allow ourselves to be guided exclusively by a scientist of one specialty. We ought to be all the more on our guard, as the great erudition and the profound study which each modern specialist has brought to bear on his subject gives to his theories a striking plausibility, a savour of exact science to

such an extent as to sway our opinions in favour of the latest treatise we have read.

Politicians, sociologists, economists, biologists, theologians and the æsthetes have had their say and have each in their turn exercised a periodical spell over the public mind. It is now the turn of the alienists. Dr. Max Nordau has by his book entitled "Degeneration" produced no small sensation throughout the world, and not least in this country. Though his work may not have made the stir of a sensational novel read by the millions, there can be little doubt that it has imposed itself on every educated mind in the country. It is no exaggeration to say that, like a sharp trumpet-blast, it has awakened the educated classes from the lethargy consequent upon the din of clashing opinions and contradictory systems. This volume has once more roused us to the fact that we, as individuals, as a nation, as a race, are travelling at comet-speed towards a goal of which we have no inkling. It sternly suggests that we are on the wrong road and that a fate of a most horrible description is rapidly befalling us—an affliction in most people's view worse that annihilation. Madness is shown to be insidiously invading our minds, and by its contagious nature threatening to prove Voltaire's biting sarcasm a stern prophecy.

It is no wonder that his work has become as it were a nightmare to millions of minds. If its dia-

gnosis and its conclusions are as irrefutable as to most people they appear to be, we indeed live in a fool's paradise: our leaders, our authorities, our men of genius, are not the beacons we have held them to be, but will-o'-the-wisps luring us into the bottomless quagmires of lunacy; the progression we vaunted is a slippery plane sliding us back to bestiality; our means for raising the masses are so many slashes at the bonds of moral order and decency, calculated to unloose the brutish Loke of modern democracy; unbridled animal appetites threaten to take the place of law and religion; all social order is being undermined; and the vilest instincts press for gratification in lust, rapine, and murder. With all the solemnity, moral persuasiveness, and scientific authority of a medical practitioner, Max Nordau tells us that a mortal disease is invading our race, and that with the end of the century the "dusk" of humanity begins.

Before we accept the views of Max Nordau, before we have recourse to the drastic remedies he seems to recommend, it is right that we should subject his theories to the closest investigation. If his work were one of exact science, there would be no necessity to refer to the personality of the author, to his peculiar point of view, and to his predilections. But, as his work partakes largely of the nature of special pleading, as his methods of reasoning are

those of the enthusiastic specialist, and as his postulates are strongly coloured by racial, national, and professional bias, the more we know of him the more easily shall we follow him in his progress on the highways of logic and in his deviations from them. Human language is not so perfect as to allow us to dispense with the additional light on expressed ideas which may be derived from one's knowledge of the speaker who gives utterance to them. To study the author as well as his work is all the more permissible, as this volume is not intended as a complete refutation of Max Nordau's conclusions, but rather aims at separating the dross from the gold and at giving him, as well as his work, their right place and their true value as telling factors in the development of our race. Indeed, this is exactly the method adopted by Max Nordau in his study, not to say dissection, of his contemporaries.

It must be clearly understood however that there is no intention of going to the length to which Max Nordau has gone in speaking of men of the day—an abuse of literature which recalls the literary squabbles of past generations. The gross vituperation and the coarse calumny he levels against those he denounces will certainly not enhance his popularity or inspire confidence in his methods in England. In fact, his frequent indulgence in personalities would

have prejudiced his work enormously were it not for the overwhelming testimony it offers of the fact that its author's mind is conspicuously devoid of the sense of the ridiculous. Had it not been for this peculiar mental defect, his treatment of his opponents could not have failed to remind him of the disputing doctors in Molière's "Malade Imaginaire."

Here we have to do not with the man, but with the author,—not with his relations to his private surroundings, but with his relation to the presentations he receives, the ideas he elaborates, and the conclusions he proclaims.

In "Degeneration," Max Nordau evidently strives to take a cosmopolitan standpoint. Only in three or four places does he speak of Germany as his own country, while he displays a remarkable erudition in foreign literature, but only a superficial knowledge of foreign circumstances. Unconsciously however he constantly betrays his German nationality. To say that he is a typical German involves by no means any slur upon his views, has nothing to do with the fact that the Germans are at this moment —for reasons entirely independent of German worth —rather unpopular in this country. It is his book that clearly announces him as a German, just as the books of Drummond and Benjamin Kidd announce them to be English. In other words, his

methods, his views, his predispositions, his standards, his ideals are thoroughly German.

Few countries have so strong a power of inspiring love for their institutions and their characteristics as Germany. Not only is the German spell over those who are born and bred in the country, but foreigners who reside there any length of time generally become thoroughly Germanized. Even English people, whose characteristic it is to create a little England around them wherever they go, are remarkably susceptible to German influence when living in the country.

Despite the propensity of many Germans, complained of by Max Nordau in his book, to imitate French art and literature, the German people have strongly pronounced characteristics, opinions, feelings, and views. We, here in England, have ample opportunity of observing the tenacity of the German bias. We sometimes meet with Germans who have conquered their native propensities and thoroughly assimilated themselves with the English nation. But, on the other hand, many Germans, when settled among us, continue to look on everything through German spectacles, and utterly fail to grasp, or even superficially to understand, the English spirit. This refers, of course, only to those who are actually born in Germany. The second generation is invariably more English than the English. We

often meet with Teutons who have come young to England, gained a position here, married English wives, brought up a large family of English children, and who yet remain as German as any *Spiesbürger* in Berlin. They do not appear so to the casual observer. Their business relations, their acquaintances, their wives, and their children, being all English, expect them to be English. They therefore assume an English outward garb, but as soon as circumstances allow them to drop their English character the German characteristics of these "tame Englishmen" come out as strong as ever. These facts are elicited in no critical spirit, but simply as proofs of the tenacity of the German bias.

The practical result of this bias is an open or secret contempt for English views, a distrust in English institutions, a want of sympathy with the English race, and doubts about the future of the British Empire.

If we wish Max Nordau's nationality to throw light on the working of his mind, we must realize what are the most essential traits of the average German.

Not yet completely freed from feudal institutions, it is natural that the German people should associate moral and political order, good administration, and personal protection, with feudal institutions. Hence an immense respect for those in authority and a

contempt for the masses, even on the part of the masses. Democratic government and individual liberty inspire the German with great distrust, because he considers that the introduction into Germany of such features would mean a social upheaval in which the meagre advantages which now each individual enjoys might be lost.

As in Germany all initiative belongs to the authorities, the people have become accustomed to bend to superiors, and where an Englishman would attempt to establish a Free Order, the Germans can conceive nought but discipline. A great number of enlightened Germans submit tacitly to all kinds of authorities because they are morally convinced that this is best for themselves and their country; but a large part of the masses, having always found that the authorities gain their ends by the use of police and military force, submit only because they are obliged. Hence a deep-rooted feeling of discontent in a nation constantly compelled to do the bidding of others. This discontent has engendered a hatred against the upper classes similar to that which in France paved the way for the first Revolution. The fear of the outbreak of this hatred gives, in the eyes of the German middle-class, an extra halo to authority.

The love of following authorities, instead of standing alone, is in Germany not confined to the domain of politics. While Englishmen, down to the wage-

young men in Germany who, on principle, have resisted the compulsory service, but brutal punishment has quickly dissuaded those of their comrades who secretly admired them from following their example. Nothing could be more unjust to the German people than to attribute to cowardice this lamb-like submission. German youths are as brave as those of any other nation, and what to us English might appear a want of both moral and physical courage is simply the powerful influence of the German bias.

Enough has been said to show that German education and German surroundings tend to foster in the human mind veneration for authority and aristocracy, contempt for the plebeian, distrust of liberty, a firm belief in the unquenchable power of man's lowest instincts, a nervous demand for authoritative repression of human passions, contentment with a prosaic existence, small resources, and poor prospects.

It is natural that a nation, whose mind is moulded in such a form, should despair of the practical realization of its ideals; that the aspirations of the German race for liberty, enjoyment, and romance should seek an outlet in the realms of the imagination; and that the Germans should be a sentimental race. In this they differ diametrically from our nation. The young German, when his humdrum

earning labourer, have, or believe they have, their own opinions about politics, administration, religion, social affairs, and even scientific problems, the Germans have an accepted authority in each of these branches. Were we to question, say, a hundred Germans in a Bierhalle, or any other public place, as to their opinions on the above-named subjects, the replies would be simply an enumeration of their authorities in each branch of knowledge. Though this characteristic is a misfortune to Germany, to the Germans it savours of a quaint reasonableness. A German socialist, asked why he blindly accepted Liebknecht's views, replied, "I should be both silly and conceited if I, a scantily educated man, with no leisure and means for study, could believe myself capable of forming a better opinion than Herr Liebknecht, who has brought a remarkable mind and great knowledge to bear on political questions."

This reasoned self-depreciation, this blind faith in authorities, accounts for much in Germany which would be impossible in England. The way, for example, in which the youths of the country are forced into the ranks of the army against their will and inclination would be out of the question with us. Here, the great majority of young men would simply refuse, and to coerce them by military executions would involve a wholesale slaughter against which the whole nation would revolt. There have been

work-day is over, will plunge into books of poetry, romance and adventure. He will worship and eagerly follow his pet heroes, but to emulate them in practical life, as a rule, does not occur to him.

His romantic admiration of female beauty, and his sentiment of love, have nothing to do with his marriage. He postpones, as a rule, the taking to himself a wife until he is fairly successful in life, when pure romantic love has ceased to exercise any spell over him, and he expects that his marriage should improve his social position and procure him a circle of desirable friends. His poetical notions of love do not interfere with the choice of a wife. What he looks for is a young woman with practical qualities, likely to be a useful *Hausfrau*, and when he has found her, he loses no time in suppressing all her poetical notions and soon reduces her to a submissive drudge.

No suspicion of inconsistency enters the mind of an average German when he reads or writes romances of love and chivalry in which the hero shows the most refined courtesy, commits deeds of self-abnegation and daring in honour of his lady-love, and exercises the utmost tact in shielding her from every harsh and unpleasant impression, and at the same time treats his wife as one devoid of all claims upon his consideration. He will exact from her such small menial services as the slave performs for

his master. He will expect her to work constantly for him, the family, and the house. He will not allow her enough time or money for her toilet, for pleasure, for book, and social intercourse. He will not stir to save her trouble or fatigue. He will come to the table in dressing-gown and slippers, and coolly look for special dishes for himself, while his wife and children have to content themselves with cheap garbage.

Germans of the middle-class who come to England frequently express their amazement at the way in which English husbands constantly pay attention to their wives. They call it undignified for the bread-winner and master of the house, on return from a day of professional work, to "dance attendance" on his wife, whose duty it is to serve her husband.

The German, prior to marriage, allows his poetical notions to be disturbed as little by his sexual emotions as by his marriage plans. In a methodical and business-like way he gratifies the former in police-supervised establishments, and what he looks upon as "constitutional sprees" are never allowed to interfere with the course of his affairs. After a night of debauch he will turn up in his studio, his office, or his home, smiling and happy as if nothing had happened.

We record these observations with no desire to criticise or to underrate the German character. Nor

do we wish to insinuate that hypocrisy and profligacy are non-existent in England. We simply wish to show that the development of the German race has induced them to conceive ideals entirely unrealizable, and to dream of aims so far off in time as to render them unattainable.

It will be evident to all who have read "Degeneration" that Max Nordau is under the influence of a strong German bias. As we proceed, we shall have occasion to point out how in many instances this bias has warped his perceptions, his reasoning, and his conclusions.

From characteristics revealed in his work, the observant reader will, no doubt, conclude that Max Nordau belongs to the Jewish race. The view he takes of the disgraceful Jew-baiting tendencies now prevailing in Germany is based on exactly the same mistakes committed by the Jews themselves, as we shall have an opportunity of verifying later on. He is evidently a free-thinking Jew, a type which we meet with everywhere, and against which as few objections can be raised as against any other type of man. The free-thinking Jew is generally clever, well-instructed, moral, and cheerful. His good qualities however do not prevent him from having his peculiar characteristics, which naturally influence his perceptions and his feelings. He has generally a cut-and-dried life-philosophy based on science and

common-sense as well as on Jewish authorities. He distrusts democracy, especially Christian democracy, and feels never quite safe except under laws and institutions which allow him to assume such ascendancy as his mental qualifications can secure for him, and those who think with him. He does not seek for primary causes, and sets up no spiritual ideals. Though he may not be religious, he has yet retained something of the monotheist creed, the predilection for worldly affairs, and the habit of looking forward to a future life rather in his descendants than in a heaven—a view which always characterized his race. His philosophy is nothing if not practical. His aims are immediate, and, as a rule, he eagerly embraces all the teachings of the materialist scientists.

Max Nordau is a modern scientist. He is not a pioneer in science, but a most persevering and plodding student of the works of others. He belongs to that class of *savants* who spend almost all their time and all their energy in reading up the authorities. So vast an erudition as he has acquired cannot be attained to without some sacrifice in other directions. The constant absorption of other peoples' opinions and theories compels the judgment to lean more and more on authorities, and this unfits it, to some extent, for independent action. It is the indefatigable readers who most blindly follow authorities, and it suffices to glance at Max Nordau's dedication to

Professor Lombroso to understand to what an extent he is subject to the influence of "Masters."

The pride taken by a scientist in his science, and the great practical results achieved by scientific investigations, naturally tend to foster an implicit confidence in its tenets. This has been especially the case during the last decades, so remarkable for religious tolerance. As the faith in old dogmas has receded, science has advanced, and in many cases taken its place. That such has been the case has naturally flattered the votaries of science, and tempted them to become prophets as well as investigators. They have come to look upon systems as dogmas, speculations as absolute truths, and in this fashion scientific superstition tends to take the place of religious superstition.

The scientifically superstitious man is an example of the dangers of a little knowledge. Not that our men of science, including the superstitious scientists, are defective in such knowledge as is attainable at our present stage, but the sum total of all human knowledge is still, and is probably destined ever to be, only partial and extremely superficial. Compared with the knowledge in the past, modern science represents an immense progress, but as to throwing light on the great secret of the Universe, far from having done anything of the sort, it has, on the contrary, revealed more and more inexplicable wonders, and

placed us face to face with more insoluble problems. Though trite, the aphorism that the more we learn the more we realize our ignorance is truer to-day than ever. It is natural and excusable that devotees of a science which to them has revealed wonderful results should raise abnormal expectations with regard to its future possibilities, and also that vanity, a weakness often co-existent with vast knowledge, should prompt a scientist to extol and glorify science far beyond the bounds of reason; for any worship offered to science rebounds necessarily on its high priests. This impossibility to realize the limits in which science moves, and the yearning for admiration, lie at the base of scientific superstition.

The scientifically superstitious man believes that science has adequately replied to those great questions which humanity has been asking itself for the last five thousand years. How was creation originated? For what purpose did it come into existence? What is man? What does the scheme of humanity involve? Have we existed before our birth? Shall we live after death? What is the origin of evil? What is eternity? What is boundlessness in space? What is reason? What is instinct? and so on.

If his excessive study has not seriously impaired his independent reasoning powers, the superstitious scientist may confess that these questions have not been replied to by science, but there will still lurk

in his mind the belief that one day science will answer them.

He does not distinguish between nomenclature, registration, and classification on the one hand, and explanation on the other. When he has named any newly-discovered substance, force, or phenomenon, he imagines that he has explained them. He believes that he has accounted for what is called matter when he has evolved the atom, and that he has unveiled the secret of life when he has discovered the protoplasm or the cell.

All scientists are not affected by scientific superstition. They generally suffer from it in an inverse ratio to the actual knowledge they have acquired. The pioneer in science generally exhibits less of this weakness than those who simply act as commentators and elaborators of other men's discoveries.

The votaries of certain sciences are less apt to indulge in scientific superstition than those of other branches. Thus, astronomers rarely exhibit any such symptoms, while biologists are more apt to do so, and psychologists are more scientifically superstitious than any other class of scientists. It might be hazardous to attempt an explanation of this fact, but may it not be found in the obviousness of outward infinity, and the impalpability of inward infinity?

Later on we shall have ample occasion to show

to what an extent Max Nordau's mind has been clouded by scientific superstition.

Finally, it must be pointed out that Max Nordau is an enemy to France. It is only human in any German. The stupendous armament of France is ostentatiously promoted with the object of revenge upon Germany. France, in her sulks over the lost provinces, takes every opportunity of showing animosity, and this despite the conciliatory attitude of her Government.

Though nearly a quarter of a century has elapsed since the disastrous war between Germany and France, the bad feeling between the two nations has unfortunately been kept up. France cannot forget the loss of her provinces, and, though the attitude of the French Government is conciliatory, outbursts of a feeling of hatred against Germany, accompanied by provocative language on the part of irresponsible men, constantly occur.

The German people, with a vivid recollection of the French invasion early in the century, and perhaps taking the expressions of the war-party in France too seriously, look upon the French nation as their arch-enemies. By the celebration of anniversaries painful to the French, and other means, the German Government keeps the animosity between the two nations alive, and impresses the people with the opinion that the heavy taxes it has to pay for arma-

ments are made indispensable by the enmity of France. It is, therefore, natural that hatred against France should prevail in Germany.

We understand that Max Nordau for a considerable time was the Paris correspondent of German papers, and we may take for granted that he would not have been able to please his German readers had he not been strongly biassed in favour of Germany against France—a fact to which his work bears ample witness.

Such is, then, the man who, in his undaunted faith in his science and in himself, in the name of truth and the welfare of humanity, and undeterred by the penalties of the Great Council and Hell Fire, has said to his brethren, — to the one, "You are Raca!" and to the other, "Thou fool!"

## CHAPTER II

### *DUSK OR DAWN!*

MAX NORDAU'S theory is that the educated classes of the world are degenerating; that the peculiarities in passions, tastes, pastimes, and moods, bear witness to such degeneration; that the cause must be found in the physical condition of the brains of such authors and artists as for the time being have the ear and the eye of the public; that the remedy against degeneration may be found in a moral quasi-compulsory supervision on the part of the non-degenerate over degenerate authors and artists. If we are not entirely exact in this summary of his postulates and conclusions, it is to a great extent Max Nordau's fault, because nowhere does he give any decided statement of the scope of his book.

In his first chapter he goes out of his way in order to protest against the misconception which represents him as having insinuated that the whole of humanity exhibited signs of decay, and he declares that his remarks apply exclusively to the

educated classes. Were this absolutely true, there would have been but small occasion for his remarkable work. But over and over again in the pages of "Degeneration" he speaks of the masses as partly affected by degeneration, and of the danger of the contamination spreading from the educated classes to the masses. He mentions the extreme Socialists and the Anarchists as the victims of the mental disease he investigates. And yet he flatters himself that the proletariat is not as the upper classes are, and bases his opinion on the fact that they appear satisfied with the old forms of art and poetry, that they prefer George Ohnet's novels to the works of the symbolists, and Mascagni's music to that of Wagner.

These statements evidently emanate from one who has mingled little with the people. The truth is that the newest books, the newest music, the newest pictures, only slowly reach the working classes, and when such works are the outcome of temporary fashion and mood, they might not reach them at all. But this by no means proves that the working classes do not experience the impulses which prompt the predilections of the upper classes.

If Max Nordau's views of the proletariat in general were confirmed by actualities prevailing among the German proletariat, a heavy load would be lifted from the shoulders of the German Government. But,

judging from the German Press—the official Press as well as the Socialistic—or from the speeches of so high an authority as the Emperor himself, there exists but little of the Philistine contentment with the present order of things of which the author speaks. On the contrary, the Emperor complains that the discontented working classes are losing their respect for things that used to be sacred to them, such as patriotism, feudal loyalty, religion, etc.

Does Max Nordau mean to tell us that the pornographic novels of certain French authors, that the works of Émile Zola and other realists, are not read by the masses in France? Who then pays for the enormous editions issued after millions have read them in *feuilleton*? Or does he wish us to believe that only the aristocracy and the upper classes in France have been affected by the mysticism which finds its outlet in the pilgrimage to Lourdes?

As to the working classes in the English-speaking countries, which, by the way, signify so little to Max Nordau that he not even once mentions them in his work, are they not children of their time, and do they not reflect every tendency, every virtue, and every vice in the upper classes? Not only would Max Nordau find, were he to investigate the matter, that those stigmata of degenera-

tion which he refers to as such—Individualism and Anarchism—are making big strides among the English-speaking working classes, but that the taste for criminal and realistic literature is growing in popularity. He would even find Wagner's music intensely applauded by audiences recruited from the working class.

Far from developing ethically in different directions, the upper and the lower classes in this country move together, each simultaneously influencing the other. While the lower classes follow the upper classes in many things—for example, politics, dress, etc.—the upper classes obtain their comic songs, their humorous stories, and most of their fun from the lower classes.

The impartial observer cannot fail to notice the kinship which exists between the proclivities of the two extremes of English society—the wealthiest nobility and the poorest labourers. Both these classes are intensely fond of sports, both degrade sport by betting, both are given to lavish expenditure, both pride themselves on physical force and pluck above everything. Both are prone to disregard the sanctity of marriage. Both indulge freely in the pleasures of eating and drinking. Individuals of both classes get on together better than they do with the middle classes. And both are only superficially religious.

Perhaps this remarkable community of tastes and

views may account for what has always been an inexplicable enigma to foreigners,—the conservative working man.

Max Nordau classes, among the indications of decay, the yearning for freedom from outward control and for complete personal independence. It is true he takes for granted that such yearnings for individual liberty aim at the realization of bestial propensities now, according to him, kept in check only by law, police, and public opinion. We shall, later on, find that he has completely misunderstood the attempts to shake off all shackles which he has noticed. Here it suffices to point out that the longing for individual freedom, which manifests itself in a thousand ways unobserved by Max Nordau, and in the upper classes takes the shape of a revolt against conventionality, is conspicuous among the working classes of Great Britain. This year's elections have proved beyond doubt that the tendency towards State Socialism which characterized the Liberal policy is fast becoming distasteful to the rank and file of voters. The tyranny, which, in the name of Socialism was exercised by the Trades Unions, will soon be a thing of the past. When at its height of development the Trades Unions hardly comprised one-fifth of the working classes, and now already the movement is in full retrogression. The Free Labour Association, though only lately

called into existence, meets with increasing support, and may no doubt be looked upon as an expression of our working classes' new-born love of freedom.

This change of mind, or, as Max Nordau would call it, this degeneration, also accounts for the present halt in the advance of the Socialistic propaganda and the rapid spread of moderate but decisive Anarchist opinions which in no small degree contributed to the recent Conservative victory at the polls.

What is here stated regarding the British working classes is true regarding the working classes of all the English-speaking countries. Everywhere we find a strong yearning for freedom from control. The remarkable point about the expressions of this yearning is that, though the votaries of the revolt against State tyranny have so far not been able to formulate any complete or practical scheme for the life of a State, or community, governed by the best instincts of the human being instead of by law, their views are rapidly gaining ground. This is especially the case in the United States, where Mr. Tucker, the editor of a little journal called *Liberty*, is steadily extending his influence.

The author of "Degeneration" distorts reality when he supposes that the upper classes of a country can be corrupt and degenerate, while the masses conform to that German Philistine ideal—a very poor one

indeed—which Max Nordau would fain hold up to them. This is proved by the fact that it is in their relations with the masses that the corruption of the upper classes becomes conspicuous, and that only through response from the masses can many forms of such corruptions become possible.

It would take us too far to record all the proofs that actualities furnish of this fact. We shall simply point out one of the many conditions in the masses which promote corruption in the educated classes, namely, poverty. The appalling, demoralizing, brutalising poverty in the large modern cities,—this poisonous fungus grown out of modern government and political corruptions, not only kills the sense of self-respect and decency in its victims, but renders prostitution, through sheer hunger and suffering, the trade of millions. It is poverty among the masses which undermines the artistic feeling of the nation, stands in the way of applied art, and compels the caterer of popular amusements to appeal to low passions and brutal instincts. Our epoch is not the first example in history where masses of destitute people exercise all their ingenuity in corrupting the wealthy citizens in the hope of snatching some crumbs of their wealth.

Dire poverty it is, with its hovels, its rags, and its diseases, which gives riches their immense value in the eyes of the people. It creates a thirst for gold.

No man thinks himself safe from falling into the abyss of modern poverty until he has amassed a large fortune and placed himself in the position of amassing more. The love of wealth corrupts Literature, Art, the Press. It is at the base of all financial, political, administrative scandals. It is responsible for mercenary marriages, which fill the law courts, pollute society, and contaminate the home.

The poverty of the masses paralyses the efforts of honest industries, honest trades, and honest professions. The men who succeed are not those who benefit their fellow-men, but those who ruthlessly trample them under foot in their heedless race for gold. It is a well-known fact that the upper classes are not prolific, and would die out were they not recruited from the ranks; if therefore the state of the masses is such as to allow its worst element to rise to influential positions in society, demoralization of the masses must inevitably produce demoralization of the classes.

We will leave it to the thinking public to consider to what extent other conditions of the masses, besides poverty, react in all countries on the upper classes—what the effects are, first on the masses, and then on the classes, of corrupt and retrograde churches, compulsory service in the army, police tyranny, bad and unjust laws, tutelage under pragmatical Philistines, caste institutions, official newspapers, State-regulated

arts and entertainments, administrative favouritism, etc.

But Max Nordau takes no heed of such all-powerful causes of corruption. He sees degeneration only in the upper classes, and, placing the cart before the horse, he regards what he considers the degenerated author and artist as the cause of a state of affairs of which they are the very last products.

There are many passages in his book that strongly suggest that he is not completely sincere in his one-sided view. The savage blows he sometimes deals at the Anarchists bear witness that this form of—as he would call it—degeneration among the masses caused him a considerable amount of uneasiness. Judging by the similarity of his language and that of the Emperor of Germany, he might well be commissioned to brand both Socialists and Anarchists as wild beasts. Be this as it may, his few allusions to the corruption of the masses serve to enhance the untrustworthiness of the signs of degeneration which he points out in the upper classes.

Among these figure prominently—who would believe it?—modern female toilets. And why? Not because they are indecent, as they have often been in other periods, but because they are eccentric. Is there then a normal dress for ladies? Or what code is there in existence to which Max Nordau can appeal? Is it a sign of degeneration to hold that

one of the chief objects of toilets is to be beautiful and to enhance the beauty of the wearer? And ought a lady who dresses according to this principle to be put down as a dweller on the border-land of madness? If women love to dress well, and men love to behold them well-dressed, would it not be madness to adopt ugly and monotonous toilets?

It is, of course, not difficult to see that the author's standard of female toilet is the plain and ugly dress of the German housewife, and that he has never realized the delight which an Englishman takes in seeing his wife richly dressed, and in a way that suits her face and form. If Max Nordau's standard of female dress is the severe draperies of the antique, he does not say so. But, if it be, we must remind him that the beauty of the classic draperies was borrowed from the beauty of the forms they revealed or partly displayed.

With the best will, we could not in northern Europe emulate the Greeks in dress. There are two objections: the climate, which demands warm covering; the sense of may-be false modesty, inherited from the early Christian ages, which prevents the display of human forms. The time will no doubt come when humanity is sufficiently pure-minded—sufficiently degenerated, as Max Nordau would probably say—to dress in clinging draperies, to expose the form more freely indoors and in warm weather; and who would

say that morality would not be the gainer? A movement in this direction is already apparent. The skirt-dance represents one stage. The appearance of an actress without shoes or stockings might well herald a return to sandals, and the abandonment of the barbarous fashion of cramping children's feet in pointed shoes.

But to call the women of European society degenerate because, under the present circumstances, they do not go about in light tunics, displaying their feet, their arms, and one leg, is hardly fair.

Our great alienist is very severe on the men of society as well, more especially for the manner in which they trim their beards. We cannot help sympathizing with men who wear a double-pointed beard when they are told that they are on the high road to lunacy because they ape Lucius Verrius, a gentleman whose portrait they have probably never seen. Such stigmata of folly could have been pointed out only by a man whose mind is completely devoid of a sense of the ridiculous.

To anybody who has not a special point to prove at all cost, it will be patent that throughout the whole course of history educated men never dressed more soberly than now. In this matter English fashion governs the world, and the ruling ideas in Englishmen's dress are durability, comfort, and adaptability to the occasions on which it is worn. Continental

men may not adhere so strictly to these ideas, but there is good reason to believe that in a short time they will do so.

Modern room and house decorations are, according to Max Nordau, so many indications of degeneration and decay. That there are many rooms and houses eccentrically furnished and decorated throughout the civilized world no one would deny. But compared with the number of houses and rooms chastely furnished and decorated in a manner which is incomparably more pleasant and attractive than the average rooms, especially in Germany and England thirty years ago, these abodes of eccentrics sink into insignificance. As to the decoration of public halls and places of amusement, we surely notice an improvement which could not point to degeneration. Hardly in any European town would such wall decorations be now permitted as disfigured the walls of public places of amusement and dancing-halls in Germany some thirty years ago—the Apollo Saal of Hamburg, to wit, the walls of which represented hell in the worst taste possible.

Here, again, Max Nordau gives us no standard to go by. He does not tell us what the house or the room of a rational being should be like, or to what extent a wealthy man may indulge in a freak, or amuse his friends by grotesque furniture and bizarre decorations, without being degenerated.

The enjoyments of society especially present symptoms which cause our psychologist to tremble for the sanity of the upper classes. Under this head, we expected him to say something of the increasing taste for healthy games and sport, for travel, and the amateur practice of the arts for amusement's sake. Had he been willing to look at the question from both sides, he might have said something about the increasing love of science, especially social science; of good books as well as bad ones; of the high prices fetched by the paintings of the old masters, even those not belonging to the pre-Raphaelite period, consequently real works of art according to Max Nordau. He might have acknowledged the improved tone in social gatherings and the marked diminution in convivial drunkenness.

While sitting in judgment upon the upper classes of Europe, why should he not have noticed the more serious side of their lives as well as their enjoyments, as manifested in subscriptions to hospitals or orphanages, and institutes of every description; sick-nursing establishments, where ladies of high rank and wealth give their personal services, sacrifices of time and comfort in the endeavour to brighten the lives of the poor, to save fallen women, to assist released prisoners, to protect children and even animals from cruelty? We say, purposely, nothing of all the charitable work done in connection with churches,

because Max Nordau and his admirers might not recognise any results of religious feeling as a proof of sanity.

But all these emphatic and unmistakable indications of the state of society—at least as valuable as the manifestations of vice, hysteria, and eccentricity—are ignored. On the other hand, he makes much of the attempts which here and there have been made, especially in Paris, with representations appealing to many senses at once; for instance, pictures exhibited with music, musical recitals in darkened rooms, etc. Such cases are not only extremely rare, but simply are another combination of many arts hardly more complicated than that represented by operas, in which dance music, poetry, and painting are mingled in order to please.

In what recorded period, and in what nation, have there not been attempts to create new sources of enjoyment? Why should not attempts be made at advance in amusements as well as in any other feature of our civilization? That many of these experiments appear silly, and end in utter failure, ought to surprise nobody, and scientists the least. Any one who has tried to invent something new, to ascertain by experiments some scientific fact, or to solve a physical or mechanical problem, ought to know that a very large number of experiments are bound to fail before success is achieved. It is strange to find in our days

a scientist condemning, as the beginning of folly, that dissatisfaction with existing things which is the primary motor of all progress and all knowledge. By doing so he ranges himself on the side of those Philistines who burnt the apostles of progress as heretics and imprisoned the pioneers of science as madmen.

The unrest which our psychologist notices in the educated classes exists as well among all the lower classes of Europe, though among them it reveals itself in other manifestations. It springs however from the same source—a strong instinctive feeling, largely corroborated by judgment, that human life in all spheres is, in the present epoch, utterly out of harmony with nature, with our irresistible instincts, and all those noble aspirations, on the realization of which our self-respect, our ease of mind, and our happiness alone can be based. It is not alone the present feeling of incongruity which disturbs humanity, but the fast-ripening conviction that we are moving in a wrong direction inspires despair, pessimism in some, and a desire for hazardous new departures in others.

This sense of unrest, this craving for change, far from being symptoms of degeneration, are the first faint indications of renewing vitality. If decay there be, it is simply the fermentation which precedes germination.

Two opposing principles, two different systems, two classes of antagonistic institutions, cannot exist in the

same place and at the same time. When therefore old things have been tried *ad nauseam* and constantly found wanting, any unprejudiced man, nay, even an animal, must experience a desire to destroy them. This feeling naturally becomes strongest in the man with an imaginative and aspiring mind: for besides the general disgust of old things, he sees in them the chief obstacles to better and higher things. The axe must precede the plough, because the forest cannot co-exist with the wheat-field. The growing enmity against old dogmas, old authorities, old forms among the educated and artistic classes, the kindling rage of the masses against existing institutions, signal the clearing of the rank jungle and the pestilential swamps prior to cultivation. The leading features of modern culture have up till now been submission to authorities, violation of nature, sacrifice of individual liberty, and progression on Collectivist lines. What wonder then that those who keenly feel the present degradation of man, achieved under old conditions, should turn against these and clamour for liberty, nature, and self?

Max Nordau, with his German-Philistine ideas, with his head crammed full of authoritative teaching, and biassed by the clap-trap of the commonest Collectivism, has utterly misunderstood the phenomena which he has only partially observed. He does not allow for the mistakes, the exaggerations, and the eccentricities committed by men who try to give ex-

pression to their feelings, their yearnings, their aspirations, unhampered by traditional bonds. He is bewildered because a movement springing entirely from feeling and instinct does not follow a fixed programme, or some dry philosophical system. He under-estimates the value of an ethical revolution, because so far it has not reached its constructive stage; and because the new apostles of liberty, intoxicated by their self-liberation, run amuck indiscriminately against all old things, be they good or bad; because the movement is in the hands of extremists, enthusiasts, and sentimentalists, and still awaits the guiding hand of the unbiassed logician, the cool-headed sociologist and economist, capable of harmonizing it with practical life and moral order.

Max Nordau, by his book, has forfeited his claim to be one of these.

## CHAPTER III

### *MYSTICISM AND THE UNKNOWABLE*

OF the good things contained in Max Nordau's book which should secure for it a place in the study of every educated man, his fourth chapter entitled "Etiology" figures conspicuously. He deals here with the causes—not the primary economic and sociological causes, but the immediate causes—of the increasing bodily debilities and mental derangements characteristic of our epoch. Such facts, or generally assumed facts, as that the average term of human life is extending; that the average stature of man has increased since the middle ages, rendering the armour of mighty men of those days too small for middle-sized men of our generation; that the average chest-measure in the German army is expanding; that personal beauty of children, women, and men is in the ascendant; that many men attain to a great age without the slightest sign of diminished mental power;—all these facts might appear so many contradictions to Max Nordau's assertions in the chapter alluded to.

But, though the consideration of them might induce

him to modify some of the minor points, they are not completely inconsistent with his general reasoning. He warns us that the excessive consumption of spirits and tobacco, the use of opiates and poisons in general, produce debility and premature death. Bad food, bad air, bad dwellings, and a great number of other disadvantages which town dwellers, especially the poor, must endure, are no doubt at least as harmful to body and mind as he proves. He rightly attributes a great number of nerve diseases to the prostration and fatigue consequent upon over-exertion and over excitement, which seems inevitable in an epoch of railways, telegraphs, and machinery.

The whole of his chapter "Etiology," however, dealing as it does with the degeneration of the masses, seems to contradict what he says in his first chapter about the upper classes only being affected by *fin de siècle* degeneration, while the masses experience only a more or less slight touch of it. It also seems to disprove his theory that degenerate authors and artists are the chief cause of degeneration among the upper classes, a view which leads him to overlook the most palpable and most powerful causes for the production of those psychological phenomena throughout civilized humanity which he notices only among the upper classes.

In discussing degeneration it is of the utmost importance to know how the affliction progresses—

whether certain authors and artists were degenerated, and then affected the upper classes — or whether the upper classes were degenerated and thus produced the degenerated authors and artists. Max Nordau seems to vacillate between the two opinions, or he considers the pernicious influence to have been reciprocal. It is however clear that he regards these authors and artists, as well as those members of the upper classes who sympathize with them, as dwellers on the borderland between sanity and madness. The stigmata, or the signs of distorted minds, he divides—as they necessarily must be divided—into bodily stigmata and mental stigmata. The bodily stigmata are of course malformations of the head, and he lays particular stress on the conformation of the ear, its more or less projecting position, the shape of the lobe, or its clinging to the head. It would have been charity and justice on his part to have explained that, while these stigmata are frequently found on lunatics and idiots, there are probably millions of people who bear them without being demented, or even eccentric.

On the other hand, it cannot be denied that there are thousands of lunatics who possess well-shaped heads and ears.

He relies however but little on the bodily stigmata, and finds them only on a few of his subjects. He deals, of course, chiefly with the mental stigmata,

and among these he gives mysticism a prominent place. He quotes from Legrain to the effect that "mystical thoughts are to be laid to the account of insanity and degeneration," but Legrain adds at once that they are observable in two states—in epilepsy and in hysterical delirium. According to his authority we consequently know that those who suffer from epilepsy and delirium are apt to be mystical. But Legrain would probably be the first to object to the conclusion that all those who are mystically inclined suffer from epilepsy and delirium.

In his definition of mysticism Max Nordau says that "the word describes a state of mind in which the subject imagines that he sees or divines unknown and inexplicable relations amongst phenomena, discerns in things hints at mysteries, and regards them as symbols." But he adds, "by which dark powers seek to unveil, or, at least, to indicate all sorts of marvels which he endeavours to guess, though generally in vain."

We have divided his definition into two parts, because placed in one sentence it seems an incorrect and unfair definition, the former part of which might be used as a proof of degeneration in a perfectly sound mind, while the latter part is the essential of the whole definition.

As we have already pointed out, science and all researches have utterly failed to furnish replies to all

questions regarding the origin, aim, plan, and final destiny of the universe and of humanity. Under such circumstances, the world around us, that which has preceded it, that which will follow it, as well as ourselves, necessarily remain mysteries. Can then any one who perceives or divines unknown, and to us now inexplicable, relations between phenomena and who discerns mysteries be regarded as a degenerate? All the scientific facts of which we are now in possession were mysteries before they were discovered, and the scientists who, guided by slight hints and sometimes by guesses, have unravelled the marvels of nature, could not surely be put down as lunatics. It is therefore evident that the phrase "dark power" is a most essential part in Max Nordau's definition, and that a man can behold mysteries, dwell on them, study them, sometimes unravel them, and remain a perfectly sane man, and that he only who is mystical and deals with mysteries in an irrational way is a degenerate.

Max Nordau says as much in his illustration of the peasant who is a mystic in his religion and in his belief in the weather-witch, but a matter-of-fact man in his farming and his business. But he is not so lenient to the exponents of the mystic school in art and literature. With regard to these, he is rather prone to determine the state of their mind according to that part of a quotation from Morel which he has

italicised in his book, "*a morbid deviation from an original type.*" The word morbid alone would have sufficed, but he seems to attach more importance to the other part of the sentence and to regard all who deviate from an original type as degenerate. He does not allow for extenuating circumstances in the authors and artists as he does in the case of the peasant. If he did, he could not class any of these, or their admirers, among the degenerates, unless he could also prove that they were irrational in their daily life and their business relations.

He acknowledges that the emotional nature of man has played a more important part in the world than his intellect, and yet he seems to have before his eyes an original type consisting exclusively of intellect and devoid of emotions. If man's destiny, his moral condition, his education, his happiness, and his usefulness in the world, were to be determined chiefly by his intellectual power, the progress of the race would have been infinitely more slow than it has been, and the bulk of individuals now alive would be far less removed from the animal than they are.

It might be contended that, if not all, at least a large number of religions have brought with them many evils, but, taking a broad view of the work accomplished by them in comparison, not with what they would have done had they been more perfect, but with that state which would have prevailed had

they never existed, no unprejudiced historian will deny that civilization and the progress of our race have been considerably accelerated through the influence of religions.

No religion is based on logic, and hardly ever were religious precepts and dogmas accepted exclusively on intellectual grounds. Faith and reasoning, considerably modified by emotion, have always formed the basis of religious beliefs.

Not only in connection with religious matters, but in every event and every development in human affairs, emotion has played an active and prominent part. Such feelings as love, friendship, ambition, lust, gratitude, hatred, revengefulness, patriotism, loyalty, chivalry, etc., are the great motive powers in the human drama, and when the intellect steps in it is as their counsellor and their servant.

True

It is therefore legitimate and reasonable for those who wish to sway human beings, who wish to educate them, elevate them, to address themselves to their emotional nature. In the position in which man is placed—living on a cosmic grain of sand, moving in space by an inexplicable power at an inconceivable speed, without knowing who he is and why he is—the mystical must perforce have a great attraction for him. To be easily impressed by the mystical is therefore one of his natural conditions, be it good, bad, or indifferent. When the emotional

nature of human beings is appealed to it is as rational for artists and poets to address themselves to the love of the mystical as to the love of the beautiful, and therefore there should be a legitimate place for mysticism in art and poetry.

It is almost inconceivable that an educated, well-balanced mind should never dwell on those immensities still unexplored, and the innumerable enigma still unsolved or insoluble, and content itself with lingering over those comparatively insignificant truths which science so far has revealed. To what an extent a man remains satisfied with quasi-explanations of scientific research depends on the strength of his imagination. It is pardonable if alienists should look upon imagination as a doubtful blessing; but though it may appear a dangerous gift in their patients, there can be little doubt that it is an indispensable attribute to a well-equipped mind. It is the mental faculty which most distinguishes man from the animals—the one on which he could with the greatest appearance of legitimacy base his claim to divine origin. Dogs may dream and horses may see ghosts, but their hallucinations are vastly different from the imagination of man, which allows him to receive and retain almost any number of presentations, to elaborate them into new combinations, thus reconstructing pictures of the past and daring conceptions of the future, capable of easy realization. A

powerful imagination is essential not only to the poet and the artist, but to the engineer, the mechanician, the statesman,—in fact, to all who set themselves a practical task or a distinct ideal.

It is the imaginative strength of the scientist which renders him a pioneer and a discoverer, and without it he is to his science what the performer of music who cannot compose is to music. From everyday experience we are justified in believing that the cramming of the memory, that much reading for examinations, or other purposes, and a developed habit of relying on authorities, tends to weaken the imagination in a man. This seems to be confirmed by the theory of psychologists: that desuetude of a faculty tends to its decay; and might well be the explanation of the often-confirmed fact that great discoverers and inventors have seldom emerged from the ranks of the omnivorous readers of the universities.

In the same manner we may explain what we have before called the scientific superstition discernible in so many scientists. The more they are satisfied with their systems, the more they take nomenclature and classification for adequate explanation, the less they are attracted by the spheres into which science has not penetrated or cannot penetrate. There is this similarity between the scientifically superstitious and the theologically superstitious—that they both believe

that they have explained all, and they thereby place themselves beyond the possibility of being right; for the mass of unexpected facts revealed by science, eclipsing as they do the wildest flight of the imagination, renders it possible for any man to be right in his speculations on the secrets of the universe save those men who say that they know all.

It is therefore not surprising that a scientist by erudition, and especially an alienist, who, by dint of studying the mechanism which connects what some call the soul, and others designate as the trinity of the consciousness, the judgment and will, with the body, has persuaded himself that there is nothing beyond nerves, cells and the grey matter, should look with contempt on imagination, and yet more so on the love of the mystical, and that his ideal man, his "original type," should possess so little imagination as to remain unaffected by the mystical.

Lack of information and of observation has caused the multitude to regard a great number of men—distinguished in the eyes of the world exclusively by their intellectual powers—as non-mystics to such a degree as to class them as atheists. The majority of such men, though distinctly at variance with the dogmas and views of established sects, have been and are in their inner consciousness, both mystics and religionists. When in public they

have seemingly attacked religion and mysticism, they have in reality only attacked churches and superstition. In the judgment of a great many intelligent men the controversy between Professor Huxley and Dr. Martineau goes far to confirm this view. When humanity, including scientists, learns to distinguish between religion and churches, it will be understood that almost all men in the past and present, who have deservedly been called great, have been religionists, and therefore mystics.

Let us instance Faraday. He belonged all his life to a sect which must be classed among the mystics, and he died a believer in its creed. Are we then to class this keen observer, accurate investigator and brilliant logician, this daring pioneer of science, this ingenious unraveller of Nature's secrets, among the degenerates? If we do, where should we class average scientists, including Max Nordau? Or should we place ourselves in the position of the common-sense German Philistine, and declare that mysticism is not mysticism when it takes the shape of the belief of a sect tolerated by the police?

But is not Faraday's mysticism perfectly compatible with a sound mind? He was one of those scientists with unclouded reasoning powers, whose knowledge — gained by investigation, not from authorities—had taught him how little he knew of

the great mysteries of creation. He recognised that our emotional cravings cannot be satisfied by science in its present stage, but only by emotional realization. Hence his religious attitude towards the great mysterious power of which he knew nothing, but whose work became more and more manifest as his investigation proceeded. What wiser course could a man adopt, who was so capable of distinguishing essence from form, than to give that form to his religion which had gratified his emotional nature as a child?

If sound minds may be mystically inclined, if our emotional nature can be reached by mysticism in poetry and art, and if our emotions are acknowledged to be receptive to elevating and pleasing impressions, the pre-Raphaelites could not all have been as degenerate as Max Nordau would have us believe. They were, no doubt, emotionalists, mystics and even symbolists, and they frankly claimed the right to be regarded as such. They considered themselves as having a mission, and the fact that a man throws himself heart and soul into his mission is no sign of degeneration.

Now, there are walks in life, callings, missions, which involve no risk to those who undertake them; there are others that involve great risks.

Some callings expose a man to bodily harm, others to mental harm. Nothing could be more

uncharitable and cruel than to revile a man, to attack his reputation, to wound his feelings and to lower his self-esteem, because he returns maimed and invalided after having fought the good fight.

A shopkeeper, a shoemaker, an author of sensational books, runs but little risk of damaging either his body or his mind. The sailor, the miner, the leader of a revolution, exposes himself to great bodily danger. The man who acquires a vast erudition may dull his imagination and his judgment; the man who strains his brain to the utmost, who, perhaps, overstrains it, in the solution of difficult problems, the man whose mission lies in the domain of the emotions exposes his mind to injury. If there be truth in this, mysticism in poetry and art may cause degeneration in the poet's or the artist's mind, especially if it be a weak one; but to conclude from this that mysticism in art springs from diseased minds is to confound cause with effect.

If we accept Max Nordau's Philistine definition of art and his views as to its mission, mysticism would have no place in art or in poetry. He would certainly exclude it, but in doing so he would contradict himself glaringly. We have already complained that he does not explain his standards, and that he does not give us his ideals. But from his work before us, it is evident that

the standard by which he would measure poetry is the work of Goethe and Shakespeare, especially the former. Goethe owes his fame largely to his "Faust,"—a mystical work if ever there was one. The prologue is religious mysticism, the first part is diabolism, the second part is arch-mysticism, which so far has resisted all attempts at interpretation. In the same manner "Hamlet," "Macbeth," and other plays of Shakespeare derive their great charm and their artistic value largely from mysticism.

All this however does not prove that either irrational or dishonest mysticism is acceptable, and much that Max Nordau says regarding pre-Raphaelitism should be taken to heart by the camp-followers of the movement. In this term we include, of course, those painters who, unable to draw and paint, try to force their pictures upon the market by sheer bounce; and empty-headed critics who insolently assume a mental, or, as they would call it, a spiritual, superiority by writing obscure, unintelligible rigmaroles in praise of pictures which attract attention by means of nought but their eccentricity. This class of people cannot be considered as representing the pre-Raphaelite movement, nor can they be called degenerate in the sense Max Nordau means, for there is a method in their degeneracy which yields pounds, shillings

and pence. We also include in this category a class of people whose conceit may border on degeneracy, and who believe that any one who cannot draw and paint is qualified for a pre-Raphaelite painter, and who sincerely assume and enjoy the position as misunderstood geniuses.

As to the crowds in the exhibitions that gather before an incomprehensible eccentricity made conspicuous by the log-rolling process, they surely do not all deserve the epithet of degenerates. Many are drawn there by sheer curiosity; others damn with faint praise, in order to escape the wrath of the fanatic. There are also, of course, many who, for the purpose of giving themselves airs, admire traits of beauty which they really fail to see. The behaviour of these hypocritical æsthetes is, of course, deplorable, but they yield to a weakness not confined to the end of our century. Andersen's story of the king's clothes, inspired by a very old German tale, is one of many evidences of the antiquity of such folly.

The sincere pre-Raphaelites deserve the sympathy of every thinking man, though they may be guilty of many imperfections. According to Max Nordau, the mission of the painter is to serve as a vehicle of beautiful impressions to the public. A man who fulfilled this mission might indeed be called an artist, and his painting might be the limits of painting as

such. But this does not prevent a picture from containing a story, a moral, or the expression of an emotion, if the painter be a good story-teller, a true poet, and a sound teacher. If a work of art can thus fulfil two high purposes instead of one, everybody is a gainer by it, and the fact that it is the embodiment of two arts instead of one cannot reasonably be made an objection. The artist who succeeds in thus blending two arts should surely not be called a degenerate.

Ruskin did not, as Max Nordau confesses, advocate any neglect in the art of painting as such, but he warned artists not to waste their time on unworthy subjects. He is a philanthropist as well as a writer on art, and feels aggrieved when the artist neglects so good an opportunity of teaching as a well-executed painting offers, and yet more when he sees art abased in order to gratify sensuality or morbid cravings for the horrible.

That Ruskin did not so absolutely disregard beautiful pictures which have no story to tell and no teaching to impart becomes incontestible when we remember his panegyrics of Turner.

Victor Hugo in his "Notre Dame de Paris" makes Claude Frollo say, when he has a book in his hand and the old cathedral before him, that the one will kill the other, meaning, of course, that books were predestined to supersede symbolism in

buildings and other arts. Max Nordau takes for granted that this has already been done. He sees no good in works of art giving expression to ideas and emotions which could so much better be described and more clearly defined in books. But is there not a great inconsistency in first admitting that art keeps within its rational limit when it presents the beauties of nature to the public in such a manner as to make them more evident, which is equal to teaching that nature is beautiful, and then to say that art oversteps its limits when it teaches, or attempts to teach, anything else?

If we survey all the means available to humanity for the conveyance of thoughts and emotions, they present a scale which begins by speech and ends with music. Though it must be acknowledged that speech only with difficulty lends itself to the expression of one or a considerable number of interdependent and intertangent complex ideas perfectly clear in a sound mind, it is however the best means we possess for lucid expression. Written prose has the same merit as speech, and may be used to express the driest mathematical facts, as well as the most poetical imaginings. Verse, we think it will be generally allowed, is better calculated to convey poetical ideas and expressions, as it admits of greater liberty, more stirring language, bolder metaphors, and because rhythm and rhyme,

in virtue of their musical qualities, appeal to the imagination and stir the emotions.

When to poetry melody is added, it becomes song, a mode of expression which appeals fully as much to our emotional nature as to our intellect. When instrumental music is added to song, to evoke emotion becomes the cardinal object, and intellect receives hardly any impression. Music without words is the mode of conveying emotions—and possibly ideas, too subtle, so to say, too spiritual to be analysed by the intellect—in so distinct a way that the emotions of the composer, and may be of the performer, are faithfully reproduced in the hearers. A mutual understanding is thus established between them as clearly as any understanding arrived at through exhaustive verbal explanation.

Scientists have endeavoured to explain on materialist lines the charm exercised by music over us, but their explanations obviously never touch more than the mechanical motion of the sound-waves and the receptive mechanism of the ear and the brain. Their dogmatizing is moreover so dry, halting, and one-sided as to convince musical people that their attempt at explanation is hopeless. Music belongs to the sphere of emotions, which lie beyond the ken of science, and will be as long as scientific progression is hampered by the materialist bias.

And yet the most unimaginative scientist will not

deny that all the methods of conveying ideas and emotions enumerated in the above scale, including instrumental music, are legitimate arts. Why then should there not be the same latitude allowed to the arts appealing to us through the sight as to those appealing to us through the hearing? If the architect, sculptor, or painter, or two of them, or even three of them, combined in collaboration, wishing to convey an impression, or to evoke an emotion, why should they not be allowed to do so by any of the means which fall within their sphere? If they should wish to evoke emotions similar to those evoked by music, and they can do so by choosing a certain subject, by introducing certain symbols, or even by recalling sentiments of the past—the time of our first love, our youth, or even our childhood—why should they not be free to do so?

The pre-Raphaelites claim the freedom to thus expand the scope of pictorial art, to sanctify it, and to make it appeal to the inmost recesses of our emotional nature; and as the movement was started at a time when art was in decadence and tended to become subservient, abroad to pruriency, and at home, to abominable Philistinism, the pre-Raphaelites deserve a better treatment than they have received at the hands of Max Nordau.

That they should commit mistakes was inevitable. It is probable that they had not realized completely

to themselves the exact results to be aimed at. Like the composer of music, they wished to convey to others such of their own emotions as they deemed legitimate, beautiful, and ennobling, and had to grope in the dark, or to trust to momentary inspiration, for the means. Being, and wishing to be emotional, they may have neglected their intellectual powers, forgetting that even when emotion reigns supreme it can express itself truly only by the aid of intelligence. Vivid emotions and powerful imaginations are not in themselves stigmata of degeneration, but rather the signs of a rich mind, so long as they remain under the control of the intellect. It is only when they run riot, unheeding the criticism of intellect, that the balance of the mind is imperilled.

In their desire to emphasize the spiritual meaning and the emotional nature of their works, the pre-Raphaelites may have committed the mistake of neglecting execution, truthfulness to nature, and the laws of optics. Finding pictures appreciated by the public in virtue of the subject and the conception, despite faulty treatment, many of them no doubt have been induced to realize their ideas and emotions on canvas before they had sufficiently trained their eye and their hand.

Every educated Englishman will understand that Max Nordau somewhat distorts facts and conveys wrong impressions in the account he gives of the

movement. Though the pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was dissolved, the movement has not been so devoid of results as he insinuates. Though the first exhibition of the Brotherhood was also the last one, pictures by the same artists have been constantly exhibited, and some of them have fetched fabulous prices. He says that Millais, amongst others, has retained that characteristic of the pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood consisting of minuteness in details, draperies, and backgrounds. Any one who has seen Millais' striking portraits, his "Cherry Ripe," "Bubbles," "Coller Herrings," and other pictures could not possibly make such an assertion. We must, of course, allow for the circumstance that Max Nordau's knowledge of the pictures he criticises is second-hand.

It is evident that he has not seen Millais' latest pictures. Had he done so, he would not have jeopardized his whole system of reasoning by holding Millais up as an example of degeneration. Here, as in many other cases, Max Nordau, while exhibiting an enormous erudition, reveals a remarkable want of logic. To call Millais degenerate is a desperate way out of a dilemma in which he has landed himself by asserting, on the one hand, that those who paint pictures such as Millais painted years ago are people with degenerate brains, and, on the other, that people who produce pictures such as Millais paints now are people of sound mind. If degeneration is the

first step towards a high, normal and sound development, Max Nordau has been guilty of much ado about nothing.

Had he ever beheld Holman Hunt's "Shadow of the Cross" even in an engraving, he could not in his description of it have committed the mistakes he has unless his mind is impervious to pictorial impressions. He says that "the shadow of his (Christ's) body falling on the ground shows the form of a cross." This is not true. The shadow of Christ's body falls on the wall, where a tool shelf and suspended tools simulate a cross. Max Nordau's erroneous description will certainly prejudice those, who have not seen the picture, against Holman Hunt.

It is natural that the materialist, the pseudo-scientifically superstitious, and the Philistine tendencies of our age, so eminently embodied in the mind of Max Nordau, and against which the pre-Raphaelite school is a protest, should militate against a fair appreciation of the tentative departure of these innovators.

The essence of their mysticism and their symbolism is in their belief in what, for lack of a better term, has been called their spiritual life—the belief that the mind is not a condition of matter, but that our thinking *Ego* might have existed before it was incarnated, and that it will live after our body has decayed. Could our earthly existence be proved finite with

certainty, could any future existence be proved a vain dream, incompatible with reason, then indeed would pre-Raphaelitism be the beginning of folly, as, in fact, would most of the things which now tend to lighten and beautify our lives. We shall not here endeavour to determine the five-thousand-year-old discussion regarding eternal life. We shall simply point out that the proofs on which the so-called materialists base their conclusions are not so absolutely convincing as to stigmatize their opponents as lunatics.

Any one who has glanced at the development of science from old times up to the present is well aware of that weakness in the mind of scientists—especially the non-pioneer scientists—which induces them to believe that the conclusions they have arrived at, generally in opposition to predecessors, are the whole truth and nothing but the truth. For thousands of years it has been the same. For each step that science has climbed upwards, its votaries, with a few brilliant exceptions, have believed themselves to be at the top, and have with scorn rejected, as sheer folly, any suggestion that the step on which they stand is rotten and that there are sounder steps higher up. The scientists of other days in their turn looked upon Columbus, Galileo, and Tycho Brahe as fools. A hundred years ago the scientists would have laughed to scorn any one who had told them that their senses

deceived them with regard to light, darkness, colours, silence and sound, and that all these presentations received by our senses were simply movement or manifestations of energy. The theory which regarded atoms as minute subdivisions of matter is quite a modern dogma, and yet it is already tottering to its fall. More rational scientists already speak of atoms as centres of force, an expression which twenty years ago was regarded as rank heresy. If the theory that atoms are centres of force is accepted, with all its consequences, science is on the threshold of a new departure which may cause the materialists to look small indeed; for if what to our senses appears as matter is a condition of force, instead of force being a condition of matter, a vista entirely opposite to that of the materialists is open to science—a vista disclosing possibilities before which we might well stand in awe.

True.

Though it is incontestable that invention and discovery have been enormously accelerated by often apparently wild suggestions by the imagination, by emotion, and by instinct, it is especially such suggestions which are visited by the most furious onslaughts on the part of the superstitious scientists. When these reject as utter folly imaginings prompted by faith or any other emotions, it is because such suggestions are not only entirely out of harmony with the scientific ideas of the moment, but because they

appear so extraordinary, so utterly destructive to the views familiar to them. They would be less positive in face of suggestions and speculations justified by emotion, if they did not constantly forget that every scientific discovery reveals facts which are not only diametrically opposed to opinions previously held, but also so marvellous as to baffle human understanding. Bearing recent scientific discovery in mind, no one will deny the folly of the man who a hundred years ago would have prophetically declared, "What we now have proved true and reasonable will in a hundred years be proved error and folly, and what to us now appears as sheer madness and rank impossibility will then be scientific truth."

Any contemporary scientist, unaffected by scientific superstition, would unhesitatingly acknowledge the probability of present scientific dogmas being declared errors, and that what would now appear as the hallucinations of an overheated imagination may become scientific truth a century hence.

Though the narrow-minded scientist who takes up his stand on the so far explored speck of the universe has no right to blame the artist or poet who, guided by emotion and faith, plunges his imagination into the surrounding abyss of the mystical, which no well-balanced mind can ignore, it would be both unjust and absurd to blame the prosaic and plodding scientist who concentrates his whole mind on scientific details,

and, to use a happy metaphor of Max Nordau himself, is building a bridge, arch by arch, out into the unknown. It is good that the Alpine climber should concentrate his attention on the steps he hews in the ice and the safe resting-point he can find for his feet, and not allow his mind to wander in the dark precipice below him or among the lofty peaks he hopes to reach. Man being two personalities, one emotional, the other intellectual, stands in need of the services of both the logical scientist and the emotional artist and poet.

Once it has been recognised that the emotions may be conveyed by pictorial art, we cannot quarrel with the *raison d'être* of the pre-Raphaelites, though we might disagree with them as to the means they are using. They can however justly demand that those who criticise their means of expression should show the possibility of better ones. Holman Hunt has aimed at evoking by his pictures a feeling of respect and admiration for religion, and in many cases has succeeded; and the means he has employed are a reverential treatment, a style of old associated with religious representations and suggestions of the supernatural. Burne Jones, whose object seems to be to emphasize the higher significance of our spiritual being over our bodily, does so by giving us pictures of maidens whose beauty is of a kind devoid of all those attractions which coquetry, roguishness, animal spirits, and exuberance of health may confer. Their

vacant and inward look suggests a contemplative mood and a yearning to see the invisible. As if to still further quicken the sluggish imagination of the masses, he cloaks his figures in draperies and surrounds them by objects which of old have been used in representing holy people. He comes as near as possible to the representation of wingless angels, without presenting anything that could not be seen in reality.

Such pictures may not appeal to everybody, but we have overwhelming evidence that they do appeal to a great number; and if the belief in a superiority over animals, in a spiritual personality, in a responsibility for our development, and in a future life, contributes to our happiness and exercises an ennobling influence on our race, the pictures of Burne Jones cannot be the work of a degenerate aiming at the degeneration of others.

What by many is considered Rossetti's masterpiece, "Dante's Dream," would by a painter, in his capacity of craftsman, be found to contain many defects, and only one great merit—exquisite colouring. The conception is eccentric, the surroundings are symbolic and mystical, and the anatomy is incorrect. There are faults of perspective, some of them glaring. For instance, the left shoulder of the angel of love who stands on the left hand of Beatrice, facing her and bending over her, is partly hidden by Beatrice's

right shoulder, which could not be possible in reality unless the two figures had only two dimensions—height and breadth, with no thickness. And yet this picture has been bought by the Corporation of Liverpool for a large sum, and is considered as a thing of joy and beauty by a mass of people among whom Max Nordau could detect but a few with malformations of the heads and the ears, and who in the whole of their life have given abundant proof of practical rationalism far greater even than that of the superstitious peasant he instances as having a sound mind.

The charm of the picture does not lie in the execution, but in the conception. It is probable that it evokes exactly the same emotion felt by Rossetti while painting it. The subject being a dream, the many symbols tend to throw the spectator into the mood in which the picture should be contemplated. There is an atmosphere of Sabbath—presentiment of bliss—which is produced by the introduction of such presentations which in our youth or childhood have been associated with that day. The artist has succeeded in intensifying the belief in the sacredness of love and the consolations which, amid the troubles of life, may be drawn from the faith in a spiritual existence.

The conceiving and representing of pictures like this, the outcome of intense emotion, might well en-

danger the balance of the painter's mind, but the soothing influence they exercise on the spectator would surely assuage rather than excite any restless mind which, deprived of a profound philosophy and a far-reaching scientific knowledge, must needs cling to faith.

The painter who produces on the canvas a beautiful scene from nature, beautiful flowers, or other beautiful objects, pleases and elevates the beholders of the picture. Max Nordau admits as much. But he does not analyse the methods by which this result is accomplished. He would probably not deny that one of the feelings which such a picture calls forth is a sympathy with nature and the Creator, and that this sympathy favours the conception of the distinct idea that the great power of the universe suggested by natural beauties—as the painter is suggested by the picture—loves the beautiful, and consequently the good.

The signification of the pre-Raphaelites in the progress of art is that they strive to teach, in the production of groups and figures, similar emotions and thoughts to those produced by the representation of natural beauties. They have therefore contributed considerably to the elevation of art so far as aims and subjects go. If they believe that a purpose can be attained only by the imitation of the unskilled pre-Raphaelite painters, by violating nature, by

eliminating perspective and by apotheosizing ugliness, they do not further that regeneration which we believe they are striving for. But there is every reason to hope that modern art will come out ennobled from the crisis into which it has been plunged, and that rising painters will see their way to paint reverently and realize their noblest aims and highest ideals, represented in naturally beautiful forms, painted with the greatest skill of a painter proud of his craft.

Whether this hope be realized or not, it seems to us that a regeneration of art would be impossible without the attempts at new departure which Max Nordau has mistaken for degeneration.

Note.

It is by no means impossible that both Nordau and this author are in the right, for "what Nordau calls degeneration" may indeed be a step to some better thing, yet may be degeneration, real degeneration — real though transitional. The two opinions are not irreconcilable. — Indeed degeneration seems nothing but a force of elimination to prepare the birth of another era, the unfit & the retarded being naturally extinguished.

# CHAPTER IV

## *THE BANKRUPTCY OF SCIENCE*

IN his chapter entitled "Symbolism," Max Nordau seeks confirmation for his theory of degeneration in the tendency, more or less perceptible all the world over, on the part of contemporary artists and poets, to have recourse to symbols in giving expression to ideas and emotions impossible to convey in ordinary language. Every one who has had to do with intricate syntheses of ideas, even of the driest and the most clearly definable kind, is well aware that language often appears inadequate to convey such syntheses from one mind to another. How much more difficult then must it be to convey in exact language a presentation conjured up from the imagination, an artistic conception, a poetical mood, a strong emotion, or a chord of emotions, to use an expression that may in itself serve as an illustration. The use of symbols, as we have just used the word chord, has not only enormously widened the capability of language, but has rendered it far more lucid, laconic, and agreeable.

A modern orator, or writer, could not possibly

dispense with symbols, for without them his speeches or his books would be intensely wordy, tiresome, and difficult to comprehend. Language is constantly being enriched by new symbols, either invented and introduced by authors, or taken from such literary works as have become classic. Often an author creates a character or an idea which typifies characters and situations frequently met with, and for which symbols have long been needed. Thus, for instance, Andersen's "Ugly Duckling" became a symbol largely used as soon as his fable was published, and when Ibsen's "Doll's House" was played for the first time in London, one newspaper, which, by the way, took Max Nordau's view of Ibsen and declared his characters impossible, in another article, if we remember aright, on the subject of marriage, used with great effect Ibsen's Nora as a symbol.

But such symbols are as old as language, and the new tendency of *littérateurs* who call themselves, or who are called, symbolists, is not to invent and to use symbols that stand for well-known and perfectly undisputed characters and situations, but such as represent new ideas, difficult to define, or undefinable, because incomplete, and concerning emotions. The same authors are also prone to use symbols for things, beings, and powers, the existence of which has not been ascertained by the senses, but simply guessed at, or evolved from consciousness.

Many such symbols were not symbols when first introduced into the language, but nouns that stood for things, or beings, supposed to be perfectly real. Thus, for instance, the word devil, which in olden times stood for a satanic majesty, adorned with horns and tail, has now become a convenient symbol, a thing only too real, but covering such immense ground, and presenting such innumerable aspects, that a symbol expressing the whole conception is extremely convenient. Nothing is commoner than to hear a clergyman use the word "the devil" in his sermon, though it be part of his creed and of his teachings that God is so omnipresent throughout the universe that there is not a square inch for a personal devil to place his foot on.

It is this kind of symbolism which Max Nordau is bent on crucifying as degeneration. As we have already said, there is a general tendency among artists to indulge in it, in order to produce moods and suggest emotions. Thus, for example, in the picture spoken of in our last chapter, "Dante's Dream," an atmosphere of love is represented by red birds, and sleep is represented by poppies strewn on the floor. In Rossetti's picture Max Nordau would have taken objection to such symbols, though he seems reconciled to the symbols used by Raphael and his school, and would probably not object to those of German allegorical painters and sculptors.

It is significant that the symbolism, which he most vehemently holds up as a stigma of degeneration, is that of the modern French poets, who have made religious symbolism their speciality. It is not difficult to see why these have been chosen as the scapegoats for the symbolism of every art and every country. It is true they boldly call themselves symbolists. But this would not be enough to elicit from Max Nordau a chapter of forty-five pages. Besides calling themselves symbolists, they have the audacity to be French. Their symbolism is religious, and, what is worse, is Roman Catholic, and, what is worst of all, it is antagonistic to science.

Though the now prevailing love for symbols does not always manifest itself in a religious way, it is natural for it to find its widest application in speeches and writings on religion. Religion avowedly deals with things not of this earth, is based not on knowledge and investigation, but on faith, and appeals not to our intellect, but to our emotional nature.

The French symbolists have created greater sympathy with their religious views than might have been expected in our rational times because, unlike the Catholic clergy of the past, they treat as symbols what before were considered as representations of actual facts. They are not orthodox; and if the Church of Rome is anxious, as it seems to be, to turn this neo-Catholicism into a means of resum-

ing its influence, it can only do so by enormously modernizing its fundamental ideas. It will be interesting to see whether the Church of Rome will accept the symbolists as co-operators, or finally spurn them as heretics.

What especially rouses the animosity of Max Nordau against the symbolists is the fact that the new movement is based on the supposition that science is bankrupt, or, in other words, that it has failed in all its promises to humanity; that it has usurped the throne of religion under false pretences; and that its incapacity to supplant religion has been demonstrated by the latest scientific discoveries. According to the idea underlying the French symbolist movement, science has during the present century aimed at the destruction of religion, and has caused religion to be neglected, discredited, and scorned.

Such a movement, founded on such premises and aiming at such aims, must be of the greatest interest to any man who watches attentively the development of our race. To study its true cause, its real nature, and its real aims, should be the desire of every earnest investigator; and if Max Nordau falls back on obloquy, indelicate insinuations, and blunt accusations, after the fashion of the militant *literati* of the past, the reason of his animosity is easily explained.

Max Nordau, like many scientists before him and with him, has taken sides in the absurd fight—the *querelle allemande*—between science and religion, which has done so much to discredit both. To the unprejudiced observer, any scientist who joins in the fray is induced to do so by his inability to distinguish between religion and church, and consequently to realize that the whole progress of science during the present century has had the result, amongst many others, of justifying such an attitude of mind towards God, the original cause, universal energy, or whatever scientists choose to call it, which religion implies.

Whoever distinguishes between church and religion will at once understand that an ascendency of religious views throughout the world may be perfectly compatible with the decay of sectarian dogmas, and that therefore many phenomena which appear to indicate the decay of religious views—such as church-going, for example,—may in reality mean a deeper religious life. If we take a comprehensive view of that progress in religious views which has been accelerated by science, we shall find that church-going, the rosary, and the images of the saints, indicate the preliminary stages of a religious evolution which in its later development requires truer expressions.

So long as we have such a number of sects and

churches, many of which differ essentially, and all of which differ to some extent, it cannot affect any one's feelings to be told that church is not religion. It is this truth that science has accentuated, and the inevitable consequence has been that the churches, though they at first might have vehemently opposed certain scientific facts, and yet more certain rash speculations founded on them, they have afterwards quietly striven to modify their views and their dogmas so that they should not clash with absolute scientific truths. That many such attempts at reconciliation between science and churches have been feeble and absurd does not disprove, but confirms the existence of the above tendency. Though perhaps it would be difficult to give a true definition of religion as distinguished from church, the conception which every thinking man forms of it is probably clear enough to allow him to realize that some churches are farther from the ideal than others.

If it be true that the progress of science has been instrumental in impelling the development of churches in the direction of a future religion of ideal beauty and ideal truth, and that such a religion must necessarily be in complete harmony with scientific facts, then the animosity of science and religion is to a sound mind incomprehensible.

Yet Max Nordau unhesitatingly takes for granted that religion and science are naturally antagonistic.

He takes very seriously the assumption of the French neo-Catholics that henceforth science will have to make room for religion. Had he any sense of humour, he would not have thus betrayed how *jalousie de métier* animates him to no small extent. He mixes up science and the scientists in a most amusing manner when he compares the neglected scientist with the idolized saint, and asks, "What saintly legend is as beautiful as the life of an enquirer who spends his existence bending over the microscope?" Does our alienist aspire to go down to posterity with a halo around his head? He regrets the good old time when the Daily Press of that date said, "We live in a scientific age," when "the news of the day reported the travels and the marriages of scientists, the *feuilleton* novels contained witty allusions to Darwin, etc."

Max Nordau completely denies that there is any foundation for the assertion of the French symbolists that science has become bankrupt—that it has not fulfilled its promises to humanity. In order to refute it, he gives us the long list of scientific achievements to which scientists who militate against religion have accustomed us, beginning with spectral analysis and finishing up with instantaneous photography. He demands for science the respect and trust of humanity, not only on the ground of what science has

accomplished, but also on the ground of what it will accomplish.

His faith in his mission deserves sincere admiration, and proves him to be one of those earnest enthusiasts who alone can advance humanity. But he does not see that his prophecies regarding future achievements are not science, but faith and religion—based, it is true, on reasonable grounds, but still faith and religion.

Nor does he see that his proud asseveration of the achievements of science, and his prophecy with regard to its future, do not constitute a refutation to the cry of the symbolists that science is bankrupt. The promises which the symbolists refer to, as being dishonoured by science, are not of the kind that could possibly be redeemed by the achievements referred to in Max Nordau's splendid list. They allude to promises not really made by science, but by rash and prejudiced scientists. These have over and over again proclaimed that religion had been supplanted by science, and that science could, or else soon would, explain all those mysteries which religion claimed to explain or to symbolize, such as first causes, final aims, existence or non-existence before and after death, the origin of evil, the essence of morality, and so on. Science, according to them, was not only to bring about perfect serenity in man's mind regarding himself and the universe, but to satisfy the

mysterious longings and the uncontrollable emotions, either hereditary, or part of man's nature, which hitherto religion alone had satisfied. Science was also to supply rational motives for purity, morality, self-sacrifice, and all the virtues and exertions which are indispensable to the elevation of our race. Finally, science was to transform us into an ideal race, living in an ideal manner, thus substituting a terrestrial heaven for humanity for the spiritual heaven which religion promised for the individual.

Max Nordau cannot blame the scientists who made these promises; for the whole of his book shows that he is in entire sympathy with them.

There was a time when the educated world believed in the arrogant promises of the scientists; when it confidently expected that mysteries, so far unexplained, would be cleared up within a reasonable time, and that systems and speculation, which were to take the place of religion, would gradually be so amended as to become capable of fulfilling so great an object.

foolish world!

But the rapid scientific discoveries which followed one upon each other, far from tending to fulfil the promises of the scientists, had the effect of persuading the world that science was not going to keep any of these promises. For each mystery it unravelled revealed a series of new mysteries behind it, and the explanatory task of science grew with its own progress. In fact, while the explanations increased

by simple arithmetical progression, the mysteries rose up in geometrical progression.

At the same time better schools, public lectures, and innumerable periodicals, initiated the masses into the secrets of the scientific free-masonry, and people began to perceive that what they, in their awe of science, believed to be perfect knowledge of the very essence of the world-phenomenon was only a series of acute observations, an intelligent classification, backed by arbitrary speculations and the superstitious faith in the omnipotence of science, culminating simply in a barren religion of humanity.

As to eternity and infinity of space, all that science could do was to tell the masses not to trouble their heads about them; as to causality, they were asked to regard it simply as "a form of thought which had nothing to do with the phenomena." As to morality, the religion of humanity seemed extremely untrustworthy: for the removal of all personal responsibility, and the certainty of complete annihilation after death, seemed to give the strong-minded and clever people the strongest possible inducement to make their fellow-beings tools for their own happiness. The promised earthly paradise was not only thousands of years ahead in time, but was to be constituted on principles which even a superficial knowledge of economy and sociology was bound to expose as an Inferno.