

Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya



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SCIENTIFIC MELIORISM

AND THE

EVOLUTION OF HAPPINESS

# SCIENTIFIC MELIORISM

AND THE

## EVOLUTION OF HAPPINESS

BY

JANE HUME CLAPPERTON

"Not as adventitious will the wise man regard the faith which is in him. The highest truth he sees he will fearlessly utter; knowing that, let what may come of it, he is thus playing his right part in the world; knowing that, if he can effect the change he aims at—well; if not—well also: though not *so* well."—HERBERT SPENCER

"The good want power, but to weep barren tears.  
The powerful goodness want, worse need for them.  
The wise want love: and those who love want wisdom;  
And all best things are thus confused to ill.  
Many are strong and rich, and would be just,  
But live among their suffering fellow-men  
As if none felt: they know not what to do."

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**I Dedicate this Book**

TO THE MEMORY OF MY EARLY TEACHERS,  
**GEORGE ELIOT AND JAMES CRANBROOK,**

WHO HAVE JOINED

“The choir invisible  
Of those immortal dead that live again  
In minds made better by their presence : live

In deeds of daring rectitude, in scorn  
For miserable aims that end in self,  
In thoughts sublime that pierce the night like stars,  
And with their mild persistence urge man's search  
To vaster issues.”

**And I Inscribe it to**

**GEORGE ARTHUR GASKELL,**

THE LIVING FRIEND

BY WHOSE AID MY AIMS HAVE SHAPED THEMSELVES TO

**SCIENTIFIC MEJLIORISM.**

## PREFACE.

---

IN bringing before the public this book, which contains my view of Scientific Meliorism, I venture to deprecate classification with Lentulus, in whom "the various aspects of 'motive' and 'cause' flitted about among the motley crowd of ideas which he regarded as original, and pregnant with reformatory efficacy. . . . The respectable man had got into his illusory maze of discoveries by letting go that clue of conformity in his thinking which he had kept fast hold of in his tailoring and manners. He regarded heterodoxy as a power in itself."

The synthetic arrangement of ideas that are not original, but the common property of the age in which we live, is the purpose I have had before me in writing this book; and if in it I do not prove to my reader that my thinking is conformable with the facts of life and the facts of thought around me, I shall have failed in the major part of my undertaking.

I shall deem it a success if, on the other hand, my reader is struck by the familiarity, not the novelty, of my views, and especially if perchance this book should bring to him, as its only revelation, the recognition of himself as Scientific Meliorist.

We are told of George Eliot that "to a friend who once playfully called her optimist she responded, 'I will

not answer to the name of optimist, but if you like to invent Meliorist, I will not say you call me out of my name.'"<sup>\*</sup> This appears (so far as I can learn) to have been the first use of the term "meliorist."

In George Eliot's "Life," vol. iii. p. 301, I find that, on June 19, 1877, she wrote in a letter to James Sully, "I don't know that I ever heard anybody use the word 'meliorist' except myself. But I begin to think that there is no good invention or discovery that has not been made by more than one person."

In the *National Reformer* for September 21, 1884, the able writer who signs himself "D." says in a note to one of his articles, "The meliorist, as such, neither asserts that life is good or bad, but contends that it can be made worth living."

In the article entitled "The Great Political Superstition," published in the *Contemporary Review* of July, 1884, Mr. Herbert Spencer has this passage: "But if we adopt either the optimist view or the meliorist view—if we say that life on the whole brings more pleasure than pain, or that it is on the way to become such that it will yield more pleasure than pain—then these actions by which life is maintained are justified, and there results a warrant for the freedom to perform them."

And in the second volume of Mr. Ward's "Dynamic Sociology," at p. 468, I find the writer saying, "From humanitarianism it is but one more step in the same direction to meliorism, which may be defined as humanitarianism *minus* all sentiment. Now, meliorism, instead of an ethical, is a dynamic principle. It implies the improvement of the social condition through cold calculation, through the adoption of indirect means. It is not content merely to alleviate present suffering; it

<sup>\*</sup> Miss Edith Simcox's article on "George Eliot" in the *Nineteenth Century* for May, 1881.

aims to create conditions under which no suffering can exist." To the word "meliorism" this note is appended: "The language seems to be indebted to George Eliot for this much-needed word, and if it is employed here with a slightly different shade of meaning from that which she originally assigned to it, it is at least one which is not only not supplied by any other word, but one which is in harmony with its etymology."

The dedication of my book was written some months before the publication of the "Life of George Eliot." The blessing of her personal intercourse was never mine; but had she not lived, my mind must, under the action of other formative influences, have shown a different result; and if my work has vitality, and takes its place as a true bud of the progressive civilization to which humanity tends, the roots from which it sprang, the germinal forces that gave it birth, ought, I conceive, to be made known.

Nor am I linked to George Eliot subjectively only; objectively also there are links.

Into the delightful social circle with which the first volume of her life makes the public acquainted I was generously and cordially welcomed. The dear friends of her youth are my valued friends; and that Mr. Bray did not live to see the publication of a work the prosecution of which he steadfastly encouraged, is a grave personal disappointment that overshadows its completion.

As compared with the life of George Eliot, that of the Rev. James Cranbrook was unhistoric. Yet to him her words apply: "The growing good of the world is dependent on" *such*. "The effect of" his "being on those around was incalculably diffusive." "That things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden



life, and rest in unvisited tombs." To Mr. Cranbrook I owe stimulus to self-culture. He gave me that inspiration to effort that comes from intimate intercourse with a pure and elevated nature, and that sympathetic instruction which makes study easy.\*

Our friendship renders a tribute of thanks to George Arthur Gaskell inappropriate, but if my "Scientific Meliorism" is ultimately valued by any minds, they are entitled to know that physical debility and its consequent mental inertia would long ago have triumphed, to the relinquishment of an enterprise that entailed much labour, but for Mr. Gaskell's patient and persistent encouragement and aid. His thorough mastery of evolution philosophy has afforded me confidence in the working out of the details of my synthesis. Each chapter as it was written has been submitted to him, and every point of difficulty discussed with him. In dealing with the land question, and elaborating the retrospect and prospect of Socialism, his assistance has been direct and wholly invaluable. The important central generalization of the chapter on "The Land," viz. the causal relation between landlordism and civilization—a generalization which is, I think, calculated to throw fresh light on the land question—was first brought forward by Mr. Gaskell, in lectures to working men delivered in Leeds, Manchester, and other places in the years 1882-3, and published in the *Brighouse News* of October 25, 1884. The two generalizations, "sympathetic selection" and "social selection," incorporated in chapter xviii, will be found by the reader formulated as laws of race in a correspondence with Mr. Darwin given as appendix to the same chapter. Also the contribution to Sociology, named "the law of the elimination of evil" (p. 396),

\* The Rev. James Cranbrook was author of "Credibilia" and "The Founders of Christianity."

belongs to Mr. Gaskell. It was arrived at some years ago, and is here published for the first time.

I need only say further, that, looking upon society as a living, growing organism of vast complexity and incalculable capacity, I have tried to distinguish between the forces which are antagonistic or destructive to the true health of that organism, and those forces, on the other hand, which directly tend to the creation of conditions under which "no suffering can exist." The possibility of evolving superior social conditions is, to my mind, a scientific certainty, dependent upon psychic effort; and since I am one of those to whom it is "a source of constant mental distortion . . . to go on pretending things are better than they are;" since I am compelled to admit that "life, though a good to men on the whole, is a doubtful good to many, and to some not a good at all," it seemed my simple duty to stimulate (so far as personal ability permitted) to this necessary psychic effort.

"And here I make an end. And if I have done well, and as is fitting the story, it is that which I desired: but if slenderly and meanly, it is that which I could attain unto" (2 Maccabees xv. 37, 38).

JANE HUME CLAPPERTON.

October, 1885.

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