

A "LUNATIC'S" IDEA OF UTOPIA.

AS REVIEWED BY LYDIA G. ROBINSON.

“OF making many books there is no end,” becomes almost painfully true in this day when printing methods seem well advanced on the road to perfection, and when education is so universal that a large percentage of the present generation cannot be prevented from expressing themselves with a certain amount of perspicacity and correctness when moved to write for publication. The natural result is that besides works of real value or mediocre inconspicuousness the markets are flooded also with a large number of more or less erratic volumes which may be practically worthless as far as intrinsic merit is concerned but to the student of psychology are sure to prove a treasure-house of interest. Such a book, but differing from the multitude in that it makes no pretensions to sanity, is the anonymous production entitled *Two Lunatics, A Remarkable Story by One of Them*, published by the Oxford Publishing Company of New York in 1889. The nameless author is known to be Dr. Charles De Medici,* a man endowed with a scintillating intellect and original, if perverted, genius whose work has come to my notice indirectly through his personal friend, Mr. A. L. Leubuscher of Brooklyn. Dr. De Medici was a born inventor and mathematician, but evidently handicapped by lack of scientific or systematic training of any kind. He spent much laborious study on the time-worn enigma of squaring the circle, and thought he was successful in the quest. Had Augustus De Morgan known of his effort he would surely have been immortalized in the incomparable *Budget of Paradoxes*.

Men speak glibly of the “irony of fate,” “the eccentricities of genius,” but what we can gather from the internal evidence of the writings of a man like Charles De Medici teaches us the pathos of

* The article “Minos and Niemand Again,” by Mr. Francis C. Russell in the present number is based upon the works of this man.

the terms when exemplified in a life of lofty ambitions and noble purpose, but combined with an untrained mind and misdirected efforts. Throughout the *Two Lunatics*, which is evidently a sort of mental autobiography in the setting of a Utopian tale, is apparent the pessimism of a disappointed man who feels that he has been rejected by the world he would fain have served. That the author calls himself one of the two lunatics, thus identifying himself with Neva, the hero of his story, is an ironical exaggeration of humility showing that he considers himself unique in possessing an insight and philosophy far beyond the wisdom of the world at large,—that world which would accuse him of insanity and which he in turn considers fairly represented by the stupid riff-raff of his tale: "The common practice of that day was to condemn and destroy whatever stood in the way of self-interest; and, having wrought the ruin of something not their own, these benighted people left things to care for themselves for the obvious reason that they did not know of anything better or even as good as that they had condemned and destroyed."

The merits of the case compel the suggestion that the book in hand is the best justification of the author's enemies if as he implies they have not always granted his work the serious consideration and respect due to the lucubrations of a sane thinker. Lest the writer be accused of hasty and prejudiced decision the following resumé and excerpts are presented to the judgment of the reader.

* * *

Neva is described as being from babyhood a child whose naturally investigating and philosophical trend of mind was thwarted by stupid elders at every turn. After he reached maturity under the guidance of tutors "whose special office was to guard against Neva's inclination to overwork his brain," he looked upon life as a variety show played by humanity on the stage of the world. This became a sort of an obsession and the effort seems to be made to impress the reader that the idea is highly original and unique, the evidence of Shakespeare's Jacques to the contrary notwithstanding.

Neva divided mankind into two classes: the ritualistic class who "are strictly honest and don't owe anybody anything," and the frivolous class who "mind their own business and let everybody look out for themselves, while neither party believes in interference with what they call the business of God." He believed in a previous and future existence, in a sort of reincarnation, and the kernel of his teaching was "mortal's immortality," although in just what this

consists is not made quite clear. It seems to be a continuous life, a "life hereafter and on this earth," and his metaphysical arguments in its behalf run as follows (pp. 25-27, 48):

"Is absence of everything thinkable? No, because there would be nobody to think and nothing to think of.

"Can 'nothing' be thought? Yes, when one thinks of something else in connection with nothing, as, for example, when we think of: Nothing in a hole [the hole is the something else].

"Then *absolute* nothing is not a tenable idea? No.

"Do I not think of nothing when I am asleep? No, for then I don't think at all.

"But when I dream? Then I do not sleep...

"Accordingly, I am or I am not. I can only *be* when and where consciousness exists. I *cannot* be where or when unconsciousness prevails....

"But, if any one asks me: Where do I go to when my body dies? I shall say: To where I find myself in a body fitted for the conscious condition required for my being; just the same, as you and I and all of us, find ourselves daily in our own bodies after waking from a sleep....

"Whosoever is possessed of a character sufficient for identification, or he who says or does what is worth recording, cannot be denied the right of resurrection, inasmuch as the record made proves previous existence."

Neva has much to say about the value of "logical tools" and the agnostic thinker to whom his remarks are addressed is represented as being so dull of comprehension that he is led in a round-about way by the wise hero to discover that *words* are meant by this enigmatical expression.

The following is his explanation to a child of how spirits whose influence has passed out into the world may be recognized again (p. 58): "When the spirit of good, kind words, or the spirit of noble deeds, are by teaching and practices, scattered among a people, that scattered spirit will in one form be attracted by one person, and in another form by another; and when the several persons so affected come in contact, and combine their minds into one common understanding, it is virtually equal to the gathering up of the scattered spirit, which sooner or later will culminate in some personified whole, through which the original character from which it emanated will be reproduced. Neither is this limitable to the individual alone, for whole nations may be imbued with one and the same spirit, at least for a while."

Neva's practical application of this view of the scattering and gathering of spirit, is shown later (p. 80) where he is represented as planning with regard to a pet project, "I will deliver these ideas in the form of a lecture from the rostrum as long and as often as I can; and, by chance, the principles may be sunk into minds and the uttered sentiments take root in the hearts of some listeners, and thus there shall be living sources as well as records from which will flow an influence which sooner or later will become a popular spirit."

In another passage the heaven of "the coming Christian" is thus described: "Heaven is a mental realm, and a conscious condition in which is blended and balanced charity and wisdom in such proportions that charity shall not be misapplied through either ignorance or caprice, and wisdom shall not be converted into cunning craft or tyrannical sway. United, these two most potent factors in ethical economy can exert a power akin to Almightyness, in proportion as the range of psychical influence is greater or less, until, in imagination, the influence extends and is expanded to the omniscient and omnipresent psychical realm of the Supreme Deity—Jehovah, whose bodily environment is the phenomenal universe. In that psychical realm all human mind is absorbed, and from it flows, as from a perpetual source, all the wisdom and all the charity which human beings exhibit on earth." (The constant use of the term "Jehovah" for the supreme divine power of the universe as if it were a broader term than God, is one instance of the author's limited information.)

A personal note, the key to the tragedy of the author's life, is very evident in the following:

"Neva saw much valuable talent and genius wasted for want of proper recognition and support in time to save it. He felt mortified to think that a common thief could go to a police-justice and by accusing himself of the crime committed, could demand a hearing. The criminal could, if he proved himself a thief, which he claimed to be, compel the authorities to give him his merited due, the punishment. But, can genius under existing laws compel the authorities to hear his claims? No.

"If a man devotes his life and energy at a sacrifice of personal comforts to the noblest of human pursuits and succeeds in discovering what might become an everlasting blessing to mankind—unless he has the material means required to buy his way through—there is no court of justice or tribunal of any kind to which he can direct his steps and demand a hearing; far less can he expect the only reward he asks for—that of having the fruit of his labors ac-

cepted as a free offering on the necessary condition that it shall be developed and applied for the benefit of all. Can it be right to give privileges to the thief that are denied the genius? . . .

"Reasoning from historical facts, it seems that every age furnishes a small number of beings of this exceptionally higher order, who are, as it were, made to do the thinking needed to humanity's progress; and yet no provision has ever been made to prevent the crying injustice done this class of beings. We are economizing in every direction; we gather in and utilize Nature's physical forces. Why not as well gather in and make use of Nature's mental powers? For want of due recognition and proper application we allow to go to waste every day much indigent genius, talent and skill, which if saved would add to our common welfare.

"We have almshouses for the pauper; we have prisons for the criminal; we have asylums for the idiot; but we have no place of shelter for the talented poor, or for genius inspired with sublime ideas, which, at the time, may perhaps appear as out of place."

Finally Neva almost perishes in a storm at sea, his last conscious thought being satisfaction "that some of his work, though unfinished, had been preserved in the minds of others, whom he hoped would perpetuate it by transmission until some one should be appointed by Providence with power to force it through." His subsequent experience is related as follows (pp. 98-99):

"Whither Neva's body went immediately after the cyclone had whisked away the 'Ocean Swan' with all on board, no one knew on earth. But Neva's soul, or that whereby he identified himself, seemed to be transmuted into the substance of a dream of which he still was conscious. In that transcendental state it appeared as every nerve fibre in the body, one by one, snapped and stopped reporting to the brain; and a curious sensation was experienced, as if falling apart and spreading out, which suggested disintegration and dissolution of the bodily components. The corporeal organs, one after another, ceased their functions and were resolved into inorganic atoms that mixed with the universal protoplasm in which the cosmical elements are cast. Then followed a sensation as if the cerebral organs began to dissolve the union that had formed the mental faculties of Neva's mind in the human body previous to the dissolution. This severance of the brain tissue apparently continued until the conscious substance was divided up into many parts, each of the molecular type, and all still possessed of thinking capacity. This whole process of dissolution resulted in a transformation of Neva, the 'being' of one human body, into Neva, the

'beings' of many molecular bodies, or elementary cells, formed of ethereal substance.

"In this new bodily environment Neva intuitively realized that he was in a spiritual condition; and it verified his belief he had while on earth, that 'spirit' individualized in a human body by groupings and union of many conscious molecular cells, constitutes 'soul'; and 'soul' dissolved into many molecular, conscious cells, becomes 'spirit'...

"The secret of reproduction appeared revealed to him; because he saw in his own consciousness, in his will-power, and in his disposition, the vivifying germs for psychical reproduction, as he saw in the ethereal cell environing him, a seed-vesicle for corporeal reproduction. He also understood that the molecular cell he occupied as a spiritual body was only one of many, each of which carried a facsimile spirit equally conscious of his own character and disposition; virtually, therefore, each of these cells, evolved from his defunct body's brain, carried the epitomized ego of Neva."

Thus in the chapter, "Among the Elements," Dr. De Medici exemplifies by an unintentional *reductio ad absurdum* the really materialistic nature of the views of many spiritualists. After death Neva becomes a molecule, spiritually endowed to be sure with surpassing perception and wisdom, but none the less a molecule subject to the same physical laws as those of the physical world. The author then continues, attempting a cosmical explanation of "soul-affinities":

"The molecular body in which Neva found himself during his transcendental state was very different from the human body he occupied on the earth. The molecular body had neither eyes to see with nor ears to hear with; neither had it a mouth for feeding or a tongue for linguistic utterance, but the whole body was translucent as ether. That was, however, not the case with all the conscious molecules moving to and fro in the cosmical realms. Many were opaque, and these seemed to repel any approach of Neva's spirit cell; others were translucent like his own; when two of these came within a certain range, each could read the other's thoughts and feelings through the translucency of their ethereal bodies. This intercommunion of the spirit cells was, therefore, a sort of cosmical 'mind reading,' and the mutual liking these spirits had for each other produced a kind of material affinity which caused attraction of their ethereal bodies equal to what is spoken of on earth as molecular attraction. On the other hand, the natural 'dislike' of the spirit in the opaque cells produced material repulsion when the

former approached the latter, and this explained to Neva what on earth was called molecular polarity.

"This, again, explains why, on the earth, where no human soul is pure in spirit, a constant mixture occurs, while in the celestial sphere described, where soul is 'sifted' and divided up into distinctive spiritual types, there the spirit, whether good or evil, preserves by natural affinity its purity."

In his molecular body Neva meets a similar section of spirit once belonging to John the Baptist but now hailing from the planet Jupiter. After some communication, "Neva wondered and felt happy that his theory advanced on earth was proven true in so far as transmigration of souls from body to body was concerned; and he felt glad to have explained the manner of this transmigration through a period of intervening spirit life; besides, he had now learned that not only did souls exchange bodily environments, but souls were susceptible of being transplanted from one planet to another."

We learn after all that the molecular experience was a dream, and Neva awakens from his shipwreck in a district of Utopia on the Antarctic continent where he is able to communicate with the strange inhabitants who speak an unknown tongue, by the mute's finger-language. (The author does not seem to realize that words would be necessary to carry on the conversations he outlines, and the difficulty would remain the same whether expressed by finger, tongue or pencil!)

It is interesting to note that the Utopian language which Neva made haste to acquire was easily learned "as it was entirely based on phonetic principles with undeviating rules of grammar." Perhaps a molecule of Neva's spirit has flitted to the brain of some Esperantist to-day and is responsible for the efforts which are being made towards an artificial language.

This new Utopia possessed a marvelous astronomical and political system. Instead of "Equality" for a slogan the motto of the judiciary was "Justice demands equity to be the rule, and equality to be the exception." Here in Utopia at last Neva is awarded a glimpse at such a "Harvest Home for Genius," as he had dreamed of and advocated. "It was a sort of relief rendezvous, where persons possessed of either genius, talent or superior skill could offer these endowments as gifts for examination and appliance. Persons so gifted were considered eligible claimants, not beggars; they could demand an examination of their productions (material or mental)." (P. 132.)

Another triumph for Neva in Utopia was the insane asylum

where he found a class of mild lunatics that surprised him (pp. 134-135):

"He had seen these same creatures in the world he came from, and there they were counted among the common-sense people, and were considered respectable—aye, even some of these were self-constituted critics who had proclaimed Neva a crank....

"One was marked: Suffering from chronic envy and arrogance.

"Another was labelled: Affected by temporary fits of hatred for poor people.

"A third: Unbalanced by too much 'learning' and too little understanding.

"A fourth was marked: Unhappy because of ennui and lack of purpose.

"The fifth one was in a straight jacket, and the label read: Delirious from intemperate greed.

"With much concern for these poor wretches, and wishing for their sakes they were in the old world, Neva left the asylum with his friend."

In visiting a publishing house, there "he found much to his delight, that the publishers in Utopia were selected from the best and most charitably disposed people, and none was awarded a license who had not been a struggling, progressive author—so he knew how it was himself."

An exploring aeronautic expedition has been sent from Utopia to the rest of the world and returns during Neva's visit, bringing some of his former friends as specimens of a strange race and students of the new order of altruism. Among these is the second of the two lunatics referred to in the title,—a man Neva had met before as a great philosopher of note, but who is adjudged insane by the standards of Utopia. In introducing him to the Utopian multitude the traveler who was responsible for his advent among them describes him in the following paragraph which shows the author's contempt for the profession of learning as practised in the world of his day:

"He is one of many who has been crammed full of learning beyond his mental capacity of understanding. This class of people, in the country I visited, are looked upon as authorities, especially if they are connected with certain educational institutions—as, for example, the public schools, which generally are controlled by a board of publicans and politicians. As to this gentleman's case, his mental defect consists chiefly in being blinded by his own wisdom so as not to be able to see the wisdom of others. He labors

under the hallucination that in olden times, and particularly in Greece, there were very many wise men; but in the present age there are none that he knows wiser than himself. Therefore he gives his whole life to the study of the dead Solon's ancient ideas, and tries to make them fit the modern notions, which naturally fails every time, for the reason that 'modern notions' have been developed under very different circumstances from those under which the ancient ideas were created. Sometimes, when he stumbles over a living philosopher of advanced ideas, and this philosopher represents the resurrected spirit of another of ancient date, he fails to recognize in the sameness of their characteristic motives and purposes that which proves the correlation, because he does not perceive an exact analogue in their respective careers as regards the position occupied and the manner of their acting. That shows the man's lack of reason, which also explains why he cannot see that the difference in the career of identical characters, equally wise, results from the natural changes in the circumstances, the conditions, the times, and the places, which constantly occur from period to period."

This Mr. Lore becomes converted to Utopianism which stood for the principles Neva had always espoused, and together they resolved if they ever returned to their former abode they would found a "Harvest-Home for Genius," and so they prepared in advance the constitution and by-laws for its establishment.

"Not long ago the Utopians fitted out another balloon expedition for the purpose of revisiting the great foreign land. Among the party selected for the trip were the two supposed lunatics, who proposed to devote some of their time on the trip thither to perfect the 'by-laws' that shall govern the grandest of all the institutions ever devised by man.

"WATCH AND WAIT—THE BALLOON IS COMING."

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Thus endeth the "Remarkable Story" of *Two Lunatics* as told "By One of Them."