

PHILOSOPHY IN THE FARM-YARD.

BY PHILIP E. B. JOURDAIN.

Observe the hen, the cat, the cow,
The little pig, the greater sow,
And you will promptly see
That each is like some one we know,
As You-know-who or So-and-so
(I don't mean you or me).

“IT is unfortunate,” said the March Hare, “that the animals in that farm-yard are so like human beings.”

“You mean that it is unfortunate that human beings are like *them*,” said I.

“That would appear not only to be implied by what I said, but to be tautological,” replied the March Hare briskly; “for to assert that A is in some respect like B is surely the same thing as to assert that B is in that respect like A.”

There was a brief silence. We were sitting on a sunny bank from which we could see, far below, a farm-yard. A Cock, several Hens, and Pigs could be seen, leisurely feeding or sleeping. The time was mid-afternoon. The March Hare continued:

“Adam Smith’s remark applies just as much to fowls as to people. You remember it? ‘Speculative systems have, in all ages of the world, been embraced upon evidence which would not have determined the judgment of a man of common sense in a matter of the smallest pecuniary interest.’ A year or so ago it was pragmatism; now it is Bergsonianism.”

“But how does that affect the farm-yard?” asked I.

“I don’t say that it does,” replied the March Hare, “What I mean is that it *did* at one time, and I wonder if, and expect that, on no better grounds than I wonder if, and expect that, the sun will rise to-morrow, it will do so again.”

“How did it?” I inquired.

"Don't you know how pragmatism came to and went from the farm-yard?" asked the March Hare; and without waiting for a reply he told me the story of

THE FATE OF THE PRAGMATIC COCK.

"The Cock used to be a Kantian and, impelled by the categorical imperative, used to get up at an early and unpleasant hour every morning and wake up the rest of the farm-yard by his crowing. This habit survived his study of Hegel. But, alas, one day in June there came to stay at the farm-house, for part of the long vacation, two Dons from Oxford, one of whom was a shining light of pragmatism. The Cock overheard some of the conversation between the two visitors, and became a convert to pragmatism. The result of the conversion was that the Cock, who was growing out of Kantianism and had ceased to believe in things-in-themselves, slid into believing, not like Mr. Rostand's Cock, that the sun could not rise without him, but that he created the sun. You see, as he gave up believing in things-in-themselves and was unchecked by science, he became a solipsist, and so, when he became convinced that the proposition "there is a sun" only began to be true when it has an influence on life, he concluded that there was no sun until he himself by his actions caused it to come into being. Thus the poor Cock fell into the same trap which Dr. Samuel Johnson, in his misunderstanding of Berkeley, thought that Berkeley had fallen into.

"From this point onwards the Cock's downfall was rapid. Since, so the Cock argued, there were no other people really, he only created the sun for his own pleasure; and since more pleasure seemed to him to be gained by resting longer in the morning, the Cock omitted to crow. He felt a momentary surprise when he saw the sun shining as brightly as ever when he awoke next morning, and was far from convinced when a neighboring Cock, who was also a pragmatist, informed him that the reason the sun had risen that morning was because *he* had created it. Awkward reflections crowded in upon our hero's mind. If two people created the *same* object, he would have to be a realist to explain that phenomenon, and realism must be avoided at all costs. But, further, realism would seem to militate against ideas of creation by the mind of anything. All this was most perplexing.

"But the Cock persevered and still refused to get up early in the mornings. So in the end the Farmer killed the Cock on the ground that it was the part of a Cock to **crow** early in the morning.

In this the Farmer acted quite as justly as that Mayor of Basel, who, in the fifteenth century, condemned a Cock to be burnt at the stake because he so far departed from the true business of a Cock as to lay an egg.

"Now, a pragmatist would hardly maintain that death was a good for any Cock; and so even the would-be pragmatists of the farm-yard were forced to believe that the proposition "the sun rises" is true. And perhaps that is why there have been no more pragmatists in that farm-yard."

The March Hare stopped. Down below, the Farmer, on his way to drive the Cows home to be milked, paused at the farm-yard gate, and with unlighted pipe between his teeth, surveyed his live-stock with apparent satisfaction for some time. Then he turned away and resumed his walk, thinking of markets and the price of barley-meal. As he walked absent-mindedly he caught his foot in a rake which was lying on the ground. Down he went, and hurt himself badly, judging from his loud and irrelevant exclamations.

He was a short distance from the farm-yard, so he did not startle the Hens much. One Hen who was near the gate showed a slight and transient alarm, but the others remained indifferent.

"Did you see any of the Fowls smile?" asked the March Hare.

"Certainly not," said I. "I thought their conduct most well-bred, though perhaps rather too indifferent."

"Then," said the March Hare, "you see that Bergsonianism has not yet made much progress in the farm-yard."

"How is that?" I asked.

"Why, M. Bergson tells us that the falling down of a man is a laughable thing. We laugh at those things, and at those things only, which are evidence that things are being enacted in a mechanical way by living people. Stretching out one's hand to grasp a pen which is not there is laughable. So is walking without thought, like an automaton, and consequently tripping over something. Of course, though, the Hens may not have laughed because they had gone beyond Bergson and become more consistent."

"Yes?" I queried, as the March Hare paused.

"M. Bergson holds that things only begin to be funny when they are something like human beings—a freak carrot, for instance; and yet that human beings become funny when they behave like automata."

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"I suppose," said the March Hare, "that Bergsonianism is attractive to many people because it persuades them that they have

the power to do things that, logically speaking, they cannot. Thus, a well-known scientific man¹ said that arithmetical laws can be disproved by certain experiments which are roughly described by some such phrase as 'two things coalesce into one.' Then, too, some people who have good digestions like to think that they are continually creating something, and can exercise free-will. And they often think they can take credit for actions which are really determined. Have you ever heard of the first convert to Bergsonianism in the farm-yard?"

"No," said I. So then the March Hare told me the story of

THE BERGSONIAN HEN.

"It was the season when normally constituted Hens actually prefer to sit for about three weeks at a time on some eggs instead of pursuing the fleeting joys of the farm-yard. A Hen of my acquaintance was thus sitting in a stuffy hen-house with a somewhat expressionless face, taking great credit to herself for sitting in a stuffy atmosphere where duty called her. The truth was she couldn't help obeying the command of Nature, and rather enjoyed the stuffiness.

"The hen-house was rather stuffier than usual. In fact, a fire had been burning the house down and had nearly reached the old Hen.

"'If this goes on much longer,' said she, 'I shall really have to get up and open a window! My nostrils always were so quick to detect any stuffy smell or . . . ' (sniff, sniff) ' . . . Was that something burning?' But nobody answered: all the others had been stifled with the smoke and burnt long ago.

"The Farmer gave her a grand burial, and a tombstone set forth her virtues. "She died," it said, "at the post of duty." And a hollow glass hemisphere winked at the sun above her bones and protected some artificial flowers from the great enemy of hen-kind—fresh air. It was all just as she would have wished.

"And the rest of the farm-yard said, with a smile: 'So that

¹ Sir Oliver Lodge says, on page 292 of his paper on "Balfour and Bergson" in the number of the *Hibbert Journal* for January, 1912 (Vol. X, pp. 290-307): "...I would contend that whereas the proposition that one added to one makes two is abstractedly beneath controversy, it need not be true for the addition of concrete things. It is not true for two globules of mercury, for instance, nor for a couple of colliding stars; not true for a pint of water added to a pint of oil of vitriol, nor for nitric oxide added to oxygen, nor for the ingredients of an explosive mixture; not necessarily true, either, for snakes in a cage, or for capital invested in a business concern, flourishing or otherwise; nor is it true, save in a temporary manner, for a couple of trout added to a pond. Life can ridicule arithmetic."

palmist she consulted *was* right after all: she wasn't boiled, but roasted!"

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"Is there any connection between Bergsonianism and sham?" I asked.

"I'm afraid so," said the March Hare. "You see, if people get into the way of thinking that they deserve credit for things which they can't help doing, or that they create the things that they merely discover—like the Hen who discovered the egg—. . . . Do you know the story?"

"No," said I.

"The story of

THE DISCOVERED EGG.

rather reminds one of the re-discovery of pragmatism, in some ways," remarked the March Hare reflectively, and paused, with rather a bitter smile on his clever brown face. "However, here it is:

"Once upon a time there was a dear old Hen, who had a great grief. Although she had eaten the Farmer's barley-meal, Indian corn and flower-seeds for fifteen years (so the gossips said), she had never yet succeeded in laying an egg. This unfulfilled moral obligation was a source of great sadness to her; not of complaint, for of course she was far too delicate (in feeling, not flesh) to touch upon such subjects in public.

"But, besides this, there was the minor consideration that, if her secret were discovered by the Farmer—well, though unfitted for roasting (I have already remarked that she had seen fifteen summers), she might yet make a digestible, though unpalatable, dish after being boiled for several hours.

"Now, one frosty morning our heroine put on her dolman, the bonnet trimmed with jet, and the brooch containing a colored cabinet photograph of her late husband, and went for a constitutional round the yard. Soon she espied, lying in a corner, an unclaimed egg. Quick as thought, she glanced behind her, thereby causing every one who saw her faded charms to look the other way, sprang on the egg with an agility surprising in a bird of her years, and settled down on it with a resigned expression of countenance, just as the Cock, with hesitating, fussy gait, and talking loudly to himself, came by.

"When she judged the egg to be sufficiently warm, she leaped

up, cackling loudly, so as to announce to all that she had laid an egg.

“But, alas, instead of the laudatory crow, she heard the crow of derision; instead of the henpeck of envy, she received the henpeck of malice and all uncharitableness; *for the egg was pottery.*”

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The next morning, so greatly had my interest in the inhabitants of the farm-yard grown, I got up to see the Fowls have breakfast. Again I met the March Hare, and I sat down by him on the hillock, expecting some more reflections of a philosophical nature.

Soon, into the silent and deserted yard—the Fowls were still shut up—came the Farmer bearing a bucket of steaming barley-meal. Having filled a long iron trough with the meal, he unlatched the Fowls’ bedroom door. There poured out a stream of noisy, hungry, struggling birds. They quickly gobbled their breakfast and, with a lazy and yet business-like air, turned away to find something else to eat, uttering happy noises of repletion.

Their philosophical standpoint seemed to me to be simply hedonistic, but the March Hare gave it a more subtle interpretation.

“The majority of those Hens,” said the March Hare, “are Spring Chickens, and were hatched at various times from January to May. It is now July, so that the January Chickens are only just about ready to be killed. None of them, however, has yet been killed. The laying Hens have, of course, seen or heard deaths last year; but the memories of Hens are notoriously bad, and the memories of the aged Hens are nearly as impaired by time as the memories of the ‘oldest inhabitants’ of villages. Thus all the Hens firmly believe in the uniformity of nature; that is to say, they believe that the Farmer will continue to feed them punctually and indefinitely. Now . . .”

The March Hare broke off. The Farmer had again entered the yard, separated one of the January Chickens from her numerous aunts and sisters, and, with a few deft movements, wrung her neck. There was not much noise; but a few Hens glanced up at the operation, and even allowed the more callous and greedy ones to snatch, unrebuked, choice morsels from under their feet. But the new young Cock was more affected. He was just crowing “Cock-a-doodle— . . .,” and stopped just before the “-doo”! He, too, had hitherto believed in the uniformity of nature, and this occurrence was a great blow to him. . . . He would have to readjust his philosophical standpoint. There was one one bright star in the firma-

ment of his disappointment: When he had reconstructed his philosophy, although he was precluded from writing a book about it, he could at least give a course of lectures to the Hens.

What happened I heard later from the March Hare. Fortunately the Cock, though he was neither an ascetic nor a monogamist, was of a deeply religious temperament. That Cock would have delighted M. Bergson: he was full of *élan vitale* and he was constructive without being at all critical. The Hens were neither constructive nor critical, so the lectures were a great success.

The gist of the lectures was this: The Farmer was Providence; and this was proved, firstly, by the powerful argument from design afforded by the wonderful principle of the uniformity of nature; and, secondly, by ocular proof that the Farmer could, on occasion, break this principle.

So, from that time on, the Farmer was treated with a new respect by the hens when he came to feed them; or rather he would have been so treated if the Hens were not so hungry.

And after being thus worshiped by implication—so to speak—as Providence, the Farmer would go indoors, where he was usually greeted by the affliction of some complaining remarks from his wife's acid tongue. His wife was an invalid, and described herself as "afflicted by Providence."

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"Talking of Optimism and Pessimism," said the March Hare; "I must tell you the story of

"THE OPTIMISTIC BULL-DOG.

"Once I knew a Bull-dog. He was brindled, very ugly, and good-tempered; he had a heart over-flowing with affection for every one, and took a cheerful view of life. He would see some children playing in the road, and would merrily waddle among them, wearing a large smile, and you could imagine him saying, rather breathlessly, and mopping his forehead with a rather loud handkerchief: 'Now children, is there room for your old uncle? Not so old, though, but that he can...'

"But the children fled with shrieks of terror.

"There are few sadder thoughts than the thought of certain kinds of optimism. But the Bull-dog did not need pity, for he never seemed to feel these rebuffs. Perhaps he was rather stupid, and perhaps that was why he was an optimist."

"I wouldn't object to people being optimists," continued the

March Hare after a pause, "if they didn't nearly always consider it to be a merit on their parts. Pessimists sometimes, but not quite so often, consider pessimism a merit. . . . Some people are so generous about overlooking the character of their actions and giving them good 'characters.' They act towards their actions, like unconscientious mistresses towards dishonest servants of whom they are anxious to get rid."

The March Hare seemed lost in reverie. Milking-time was drawing near, and a member of the advance-guard of Cows returning to the farm-yard stopped and looked over the gate.

The Cow had a face like those women whom one calls "clean and respectable." She hardly merited the whole of this description, but she was certainly respectable—from lack of opportunity, once said a spiteful and rakish Cock.

The Parrot in the sitting-room window began to quote largely from *Hymns Ancient and Modern*; and the Cow gave a wan smile and remarked, in a deprecating tone, to the farm-yard:

"Law, how he do talk; I've never had much time for readin' myself, what with one thing and another, and doin' for my 'usband and children. . . ."

But the old Sow interrupted her, poking her nose through the lower gate and saying, in a shrill monotone, and with a strong Dorset accent:

"Children! Be ye tarken to I 'bout children? I've had thirty children a year for the last dree years and I be Darset barn and Darset bred, and so was vaither and mother!

"Yes, and nary a one of em what's living can say a word agin I. I've brought em up *prapper*, I have," she added aggressively, and then turned to one of her troublesome off-spring:

"Now then, Jarge, what be you doing, pulling of me skirts. I'll teach ye manners!" and she seized him neatly by the back, and bit him, so that he died.

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"That illustrates what I said about people's generosity," said the March Hare sardonically, "even better than the story of

THE CONSCIENTIOUS HEN

that I was going to tell you."

"Do tell it," said I.

"It also illustrates the fact that that sort of generosity, though it obviously increases self-esteem, does not always tend to happiness."

The March Hare paused for an instant and then began:

"'I've not had a minute's peace since these blessed motors were invented,' said the Hen untruthfully, as she fluffed out her feathers in her comfortable sand-bath on the sunny side of the hedge; 'why, cr-r-r-k! if here isn't another of 'em!'

"And, cackling loudly, she snatched up her reticule and rushed from her place of safety to the nearest point of danger, and perished."

* * *

"Has all this anything to do with pragmatism or Bergsonianism, do you think?" I asked.

"Well," said the March Hare, "when people lay greater importance on practical conduct than on the conduct of the intellect, on what they call 'intuition,' than reason, and have rather loose ideas on the meaning of truth, it seems to me that apparent advisability must come to be more highly esteemed than logical or even ethical permissibility."

"You spoke of 'intuition' just now," said I. "Doesn't that sound rather Kantian?"

"Yes, but Bergsonianism is radically opposed to the old intellectualism of Kant."

Just then the Turkey-Cock came slowly by. He was making that sort of noise that people usually describe as "gobbling"; what he really was saying was "Categorical, categorical." A Duckling ran between his legs after some morsel that looked good to eat, without showing the slightest reverence for the Turkey-Cock.

"Nobody respects the old Kantian Turkey-Cock now," continued the March Hare. "Apparently Bergsonianism has already got a hold on the Ducks."

A comparatively young Duck came waddling by, and overheard the last words. "Ah, that *dear* M. Bergson!" said she. "Isn't it nice to think that intuition—'woman's triple intuition' as *dear* Rudyard Kipling calls it—carries us *so* much farther than the intellect!"

The March Hare gave a cynical smile, looked at the Duck's retreating form, and said: "She has gone to wait for the Cock, for whom she has conceived a passion based on her new philosophy. She does not pretend indifference as Hens do." This reminded the March Hare of something, and soon he went on:

"One spring, many ladies used to wear nearly entire Cocks on their hats. Somebody I knew wore a hat like this, and she used to write for hours out of doors just behind a privet hedge little

more than four feet high. The hat had a most ludicrous appearance when viewed from the other side of the hedge. A Cock of unknown breed and strange attitude seemed to move slowly backwards and forwards along a path about six inches long on the top of the hedge.

"I was puzzled at first by observing that, every fine morning, the Hens from a farm-yard across the road gathered in a sort of *queue* at the garden-gate of my friend's house, waiting for the gate to open. At least the older Hens waited. The younger Hens gave their well-known scuffling jump to the top of the wall, and a scuffling jump down on the other side,—but without making the customary useless noises.

"One day I determined to solve the mystery. I went in at the gate, carefully closing it behind me. I have no doubt that I was the means of causing great disappointment to many old Hens. But I have no doubt that they concealed their disappointment very well, as only Hens can.

"Dozens of the younger Hens were strolling about near the privet hedge, busily engaged in looking for food. My friend was hard at work writing on the other side of the hedge. . . .

"Then I did a tactless thing. I sat down and roared with laughter. I was not close enough seriously to alarm the Hens, and they merely looked at me with some scorn and moved away indifferently, proclaiming in every motion that there were just as good pickings in places nowhere near the privet hedge. In this statement they were certainly correct."

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We sat side by side, smoking and silent, for a long time. The sun set, and the Hens soon began of their own accord to go into their house to roost for the night. When they were all in, the dark and hardly distinguishable figure of the Farmer came out of the farm-house and shut the little door of the hen-house. Then a bright moon rose up above the trees. And then at last the March Hare spoke with a passionate earnestness:

"It makes me angry and sorry at the same time to see nearly everybody believing that he or she is creating something or hoping to create something. They talk of 'creative work,' 'constructive ideas,' and 'destructive' or 'negative' criticism, and get carried away by superficial analogies to building operations, all for this reason. They think that any one who points out that truth is not made by them, and that all they can do is uncreatively to discover things and label them, insults their powers. Criticism they dis-

parage, and, if they are polite and more or less well-educated, they call it 'merely analytic in the Kantian sense'; if they are less polite and less educated, they call it 'scholastic.' And yet criticism has exactly the same object, as any other investigation: the discovery of truth. And some people persist in maintaining that criticism has about the same status as a personal remark. . . ."

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!" came from the hen-house. The moon was very bright; so bright that many people would untruthfully call the landscape "as bright as day." The Cock seemed really to have trusted too much to his astronomy and mistaken the light of the moon for the light of the sun.

The March Hare seemed to be recalled to earth by the Cock's interruption. He sat down, and, after a short silence said bitterly:

"The pragmatists and Bergsonians hail what they think is a sun that they think they have made. It isn't a sun, and they haven't made it. Perhaps they will find both things out some day."

* * *

But I was engrossed with a more human problem. The crowing continued for some time, but soon the Cock stopped suddenly. I am sure that he felt that he had been making a fool of himself, and nothing is more heart-breaking than that, especially when it is as true as it usually is. I felt quite genuinely sorry for the Cock.

When, some hours later, the sun really did rise, there was no greeting crow. I was really seriously concerned about the Cock. Perhaps if he were removed to a new yard where nobody knew anything about him. . . ., or perhaps if. . . . I nearly fell asleep with the exertion of making plans for the Cock's future.

But, as a matter of fact, the Cock was asleep until six in the morning.

Perhaps, after all, philosophy does not really have such a profound influence on our lives—even on the life of a Cock.