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HANS BREITMANN'S "PHILOSOPHY."

IT may be remembered by some of Hans Breitmann's, the German Yankee's, admirers, that when at the head of his Pennsylvanian cavalry corps he encountered the troop of Southerners headed by Breitmann junior in person, before the recognition between the father and the son, the elder Breitmann demanded the surrender of the younger after his defeat in the following memorable words :—

"Your dime is oop, you got to die, and I your briest will pe ;
Peliev'st dou in Morál Ideas? If so I lets you free?"

The younger Breitmann did not, it appeared at that time, know if so much as that there were any "moral ideas" to believe in, being, as he himself averred, "ignorant as the nigs, for dey takes the *Tribune*;" nor were the "moral ideas" of the German bummer fully developed in the first issue of these songs in his praise. In the instructive supplements,* however, which our English publishers are strenuously competing with each other for the glory of giving to the English public, containing his "Story about a Philosophede"† and his social and political adventures, we have fuller data for getting at his Teuton-Yankee creed, though the subject is not without its philosophical difficulties. What those difficulties are, we may illustrate by reference to Mr. Disraeli's remarkable statement in the House of Commons last week, to the effect that he had been positively assured by the unanimous consent of his many philosophical friends, that where the finite resources of man's intellect end, there the insoluble and infinite problems comprehended under what Mr. Disraeli calls religion, begin. Now it is clear that a superficial study of the "moral ideas" inculcated in the Breitmann ballads would lead to the impression that not merely religion, but morality, in the large and vague sense in which the Teutonic mind uses that term, is supposed to involve the infinite. Nothing is more remarkable in these ballads than the transcendental ideas which intrude into the discussion of the most homely topics,—the *a priori* notions which govern the treatment of the most familiar subjects, the tendency of what one would imagine the grossest interests to burst into the infinite and traverse the world of the supersensual. Our readers will remember the illustration of this to be derived from the closing verse of "Hans Breitmann's Barty":—

"Hans Breitmann gif a barty—
Where ish dat barty now?
Where ish der lufly colden glond
Dat float on der moundain's prow?
Where ish de himmelstrahlende Stern—
De shtar of de shpirt's light?
All gon'd afay mit der lager-peer—
Afay in de ewigkeit!"

Perhaps it may be said that this is the mere transcendentalism of sentiment, not of a deliberate creed, not of "moral ideas"; nor is it difficult to pass the same criticism on the final verse of "Breitmann in Kansas," where we are told that

"Hans Breitmann vent to Kansas;
Droo all dis earthly land,
A-vorkin' out life's mission here
Soobyectify und grand.
Some beobleh runs de beautiful
Some vorks philosophie;
Der Breitmann solf de infinide
Ash von eternal shpree!"

In spite of these striking indications that Hans Breitmann's mind is fully conversant with the Hegelian and Schellingite 'philosophy of the infinite,' may it not still be possible that in his true philosophical creed he agrees with Mr. Disraeli and Dr. Mansel and other leading minds of the favourite English metaphysical school, and believes that his countrymen have made a mistake in attempting to develop the infinite out of the limited and finite human intellect? What light do these new ballads cast upon the intrinsic nature of Breitmann's own 'moral ideas'? Is he really at heart an adherent of the transcendental school of his distinguished countrymen Schelling and Hegel, or does he adopt the soberer and more moderate notions of Hamilton and Mansel? Does he believe that the whole universe is given us *a priori* in the furniture of our minds, or that all our knowledge is the birth of slow experience, and derived from without,—'moral ideas' included? On this great question the new ballads now for the first time before us afford us very interesting data for coming to a conclusion; and we are disposed to think that the conclusion must be this,—that Breitmann's sober intellect is rather in opposition to his overflowing German sentiment, and indeed by no means in harmony with the more imaginative intellectual creed of the party which proposed him for Congress. He may even be a Manselite at heart, and believe in 'the law of the Unconditioned.' For although he

seems to have accepted the striking transcendental principles laid down by his party in the following programme, we shall adduce ample reasons for believing that he accepted them only in a subjective and sceptical sense, not so much as declaring the constitution of the universe itself, as the intellectual prepossessions of the German mind:—

"THE COMMITTEE OF INSTRUCTION.

"Denn for our Insdructions Comedy de ding was protocollirt"
By Docktor Emsig Grubler, who in Jena vonce studirt;†
Und for Breitmann his insdructions de Comedy tid say
Dat de All out-going from de Ones vash die first Morál Idée.
"Und de segondt crate Morál Idée dat into him ve rings
Vas dat government for efery man moost alfays do efery dings;
Und die next Idée do witch his mindt especially ve gall,
Ish to do mitout a Bresident und no government ad all.
"Und die fourt Idée ve vish der Hans vouldt alfays keeb in fiew
Ish to cooldifate die Peaudifool, likewise de Goot und Drue;
Und de form of dis oopright-hood in proctise to present,
He moosht get our liddle pills all bassed, mitout id's gostin' a cent.
"Und de fift Idée—ash learnin' ish de cratest ding on eart,
Und ash Shoopider de Vater to Minerfa gife ge-birt!‡—
Ve peg dat Breitmann onto oos all poeple tockuments
Vich he can grap or shteal vill sendt—franked—mit his gompliments.
"Die sechste crate Morál Idée—since id fery vell ish known
Dat mind ish de resooldt of food, as der Moleschott has shown,
Und ash mind ish de highest form of Goot, as in Fichte dot' abbeear—
He moost alfays go mit de barty dat go for lager-bier."

Now the first remark we must make here is that these transcendental principles, though evidently of the Platonic school of idealism, are *not* Breitmann's own, but rather those of the German party which is represented and interpreted by the learning of Juris Doctor Emsig Grubler. There is an evident allusion to the *Parmenides* of Plato in the first great principle laid down:—

"Dat de All out-going from de Ones vash die first Morál Idée."

Whether the One is prior to the Many, or the Many to the One, is, of course, the great question of the old dialectic on which so much is argued *pro* and *con* in the *Parmenides*. It is striking to find that any party in the United States should have such pronounced views on so high a question as to instruct their candidate to adopt this view dogmatically in Congress, especially as historically it cannot be questioned that "the Many" preceded the One in the history of the Union; for it was *not* one State which divided and multiplied itself into many, but the Many which constituted themselves by the act of federation into One. It is obvious, however, that the doctrine is regarded by the party not so much in its historical as in its political relations. The Germans maintain the notion that the Union must for the future be the fountain of power; that the Many (the States), if they receive power at all, must receive it as delegated to them by the One. And in this sense, no doubt, Breitmann, without committing himself to the abstract metaphysical doctrine of the Eleatics, accepted the first intimation of his Committee. The second "moral idea," "dat Government for efery man moost alfays do efery dings," should be taken in strict connection with the first and third. The first taught that the Union, the nation, was the new source of power,—the many, the States, only the delegates of it; the second teaches that this principle, so far from making the Union or the nation irresponsible to its component parts, imposes on it the heavier responsibility, since though proceeding from the One, the end of the Government is in the Many, nay, so much so, that we may even proclaim roundly that that "government for efery man moost alfays do efery dings"—a fearful weight of responsibility, which only a republican Government would ever venture to accept. And then how rigid the dialectic which goes on to infer that the One which has so completely broken up into the Many as to live only in the multiplicity of popular life is in effect 'no government at all,' since *constraint* is no longer imposed or perceived, because the centripetal force becomes evanescent, and the Presidential government, which truly does "efery dings" for "efery man," is, so far at least as painful imposts or prohibitions are concerned, equivalent to doing "Mitout a Bresident and no government ad all." The fourth "moral idea" introduces us to the *qualitative* analysis of the One, as we have before been introduced to its *quantitative* analysis. In quantity the One breaks up into the Many, *i.e.*, in the expressive language of the poet, "efery man" and "efery dings;"—in the former respect, —in respect of quality, the One is the *summum bonum*, and breaks up into the beautiful, or æsthetical good, the good (in a narrower and more ethical sense), or moral good, and the true, or intellectual good. The fifth "moral idea" is the embodiment of these elements of the good in an earthly form by means of the

* 1. *Hans Breitmann's Barty and other Droll Ballads, with the Story about a Philosophede*. Printed here for the first time. London: J. O. Hotten.

2. *Hans Breitmann in Politics*. By Charles G. Leland. Second Series. London: J. O. Hotten.

3. *Hans Breitmann's Christmas, with other Ballads*. By Charles G. Leland. London: Trübner and Co.

† Mr. Trübner, who first introduced Hans Breitmann to English readers, is the first to give the complete story about "the philosophede." Mr. Hotten giving only the first part; Mr. Hotten is first to give the very amusing political ballads. On the other hand, none of the Christmas and other ballads given in Mr. Trübner's second part, except the first part of that on "the philosophede," is contained in Mr. Hotten's issues.

‡ Planned or sketched out. † 'Studiren,' Ger. To study. ‡ Geburt, Ger. Birth.

birth of true culture, symbolized in Minerva born out of the head of Jupiter, who represents beauty, virtue, and truth, but whose worship requires that they should be imparted in the form of teaching to men,—a truth represented in the American Constitution in the distribution of blue-books gratis by post from Washington. The sixth great “*morál idéé*,” in identifying mind absolutely with the consumption of Lagerbier, is only a symbolic mode of accepting the Hegelian principle of the virtual identity of the Idea and the external Universe; but it may have been accepted by Breitmann simply as a regulative idea for his own political practice, and not absolutely. And now for the proof that he himself belongs to a different school of metaphysics. In another ballad, Breitmann actually interrupts a great politician, who is stating Mr. Disraeli’s well-known view, that the dregs of the people too often unite with the aristocracy to resist the middle-class, with this remarkable profession of his own faith, which really commits him to the well-known ethical principle of Aristotle’s school, that *virtue is a mean between two extremes*:—

“Here Breitmann led his schdeam out: ‘Dis shdory goes to show
Dat in poledicks, ash lager, *virtus in medio*.
De drecks ish ad de pottom—de skoom floods high inteed;
Boot daas bier ish in de mittile, says an goot old Sherman lied.
“Und shoost apout elegdion-dimes de scoom und drecks, ve see,
Have a pully Wahl-verwandtschaft, or election-sympathie.”

Is it possible for Breitmann to declare more distinctly his adhesion to the moderate or experience school of ethics, instead of to the high *a priori* way of thinking? He interrupts another speaker to protest against the random evolution of one logical idea out of its opposite by the well-known Hegelian process, and to assert his confidence in the sober principle that virtue lies in the mean between two extremes. Can we doubt that he would also accept the principle that human truth lies in the finite region between two infinities neither of which we can absolutely grasp, and which seem to be inconsistent, yet both of which we must practically accept? If this seem insufficient evidence, let us adduce in proof of Breitmann’s creed the evidently significant parable about a velocipede, which of course must be meant to go far deeper than it seems:—

“STORY ABOUT SCHNITZERL’S PHILOSOPHEDE.

“Herr Schnitzerl make a philosopede,
Von of de pullyest kind;
It vent mitout a vheel in vront,
Und hadn’t none pehind.
Von vheel vas in de mittil, dough,
Und it vent as sure ash ecks,
For he shtraddled on de axel dree
Mit der vheel peetween his lecks.

“Und vhen he vant to shtart id off
He paddlet mit his feet,
Und soon he cot to go so vast
Dat efery dings he peat.
He run her out on Broader shtreet,
He shkeoted like der vind,
Hei! how he bassed de vancy crabs,
Und lef dem all pehind!

“De vellers mit de trotting nags
Pooled oop to see him bass:
De Deutchers all erstannished saidt:
‘Potztausend! Was ist das?’
Boot vaster shtill der Schnitzerl flewed
On—mit a ghastly shmile,
He tidn’t touch de dirt, py shings!
Not vonce in half a mile.

“Oh, vot ish all dis eartly pliss?
Oh, vot ish man’s soocksess?
Oh, vot ish various kinds of dings?
Und vot ish hobbiness?
Ve find a pank node in de shtreedt,
Next dings der pank ish preak;
Ve falls, und knocks our outsides in,
Van ve a ten shtrike make.

“So vas it mit der Schnitzerlein
On his philosopede;
His feet both shlippeid outsideward shoost
Vhen at his extra shpeed.
He felled oopon der vheel of course;
De vheel like blitzen flew;
Und Schnitzerl he vos schnitz in vact,
Vor id slished him guide in two.

“Und as for his philosopede,
Id cot so shkared, men say,
It pounded onward till it vent
Ganz tyfelwards afay,
Boot vhere ish now der Schnitzerl’s soul?
Vhere dos his shbirit pide?
In Himmel troo de endless plue,
It takes a medeor ride.”

That this story, or the next part of it which is too long for extract, can be seriously meant to refer to a common

velocipede is, of course, not to be supposed for a moment. Is it not clear that its drift is to recommend the homely, peripatetic, or walking school of philosophy, by setting forth in an image the terrible results of committing yourself to an ideal method which is too strong for you, which runs away with you, throws you down, cuts you in two, and dashes off over you into the infinite where you can never follow it? The single wheel of the velocipede is the ever-moving ‘Idea’ of Hegel, on which, it is admitted, a finite being may attain a motion far more violent than is natural or safe for him; but which ends in dividing him against himself, and leaving him thus mutilated and helpless on the earth, while it dashes on with more and more dizzy speed devilwards for ever. Breitmann could hardly have warned his countrymen against their ambitious *a priori* philosophy more strikingly than in the “*Vanitas vanitatum*” of the fine verse which asks

“Oh, vot ish all dis eartly pliss,
Oh, vot ish man’s soocksess?
Oh, vot ish various kinds of dings?
And vot ish hobbiness?”

They are all, he would intimate, really attainable, but only by the true modesty of the finite. *Virtus in medio*. If you would philosophize truly, you must walk on the earth, and not get a philosophical engine too strong for you, which, with a happy use of the German patois of Pennsylvania, he calls a *philosopede*,—a philosophic engine which attains unnatural swiftness by using a wheel, instead of the cautious symbol of the peripatetic school, the human foot. How can he express better the giddiness and perplexity of mind produced by such a motion than by his striking question, “Vot ish various kinds of dings?” Having lost mastery of itself, the mind gazes helplessly in every direction at once, and cannot even ask any distinct question. Nay, though Schnitzerl’s soul expiates the rashness of his earthly exploit by taking “a medeor ride” “troo de endless plue,” Breitmann intends us to distinguish between the crime and the criminal. Schnitzerl may some day be pardoned and attain rest, but the ambitious philosophy of his countrymen will be devoted to a sort of eternal Wild Huntsman’s chase and rush on *devilwards*, till its evil essence be at length really revealed. Breitmann’s “*morál idées*” are, after all, truly modest. We must distinguish his views from those of the Committee who ask him to stand for Congress, and whose platform he can only accept in a subjective and regulative sense. Breitmann himself is evidently a follower of the experience philosophy, perhaps even a Millite,—at most a Manselite. These ballads in his honour are a deliberate satire on the high German transcendentalism.