

Chapter 5. The Phoenix.

Putting which four singular Chapters together, and alongside of them numerous hints, and even direct utterances, scattered over these Writings of his, we come upon the startling yet not quite unlooked-for conclusion, that Teufelsdröckh is one of those who consider Society, properly so called, to be as good as extinct; and that only the gregarious feelings, and old inherited habitudes, at this juncture, hold us from Dispersion, and universal national, civil, domestic and personal war! He says expressly: "For the last three centuries, above all for the last three quarters of a century, that same Pericardial Nervous Tissue (as we named it) of Religion, where lies the Life-essence of Society, has been smote at and perforated, needfully and needlessly; till now it is quite rent into shreds; and Society, long pining, diabetic, consumptive, can be regarded as defunct; for those spasmodic, galvanic sprawlings are not life; neither indeed will they endure, galvanize as you may, beyond two days."

"Call ye that a Society," cries he again, "where there is no longer any Social Idea extant; not so much as the Idea of a common Home, but only of a common over-crowded Lodging-house? Where each, isolated, regardless of his neighbor, turned against his neighbor, clutches what he can get, and cries 'Mine!' and calls it Peace, because, in the cut-purse and cut-throat Scramble, no steel knives, but only a far cunninger sort, can be employed? Where Friendship, Communion, has become an incredible tradition; and your holiest Sacramental Supper is a smoking Tavern Dinner, with Cook for Evangelist? Where your Priest has no tongue but for plate-licking: and your high Guides and Governors cannot guide; but on all hands hear it passionately proclaimed: *Laissez faire*; Leave us alone of *your* guidance, such light is darker than darkness; eat you your wages, and sleep!

"Thus, too," continues he, "does an observant eye discern everywhere that saddest spectacle: The Poor perishing, like neglected, foundered Draught-Cattle, of Hunger and Overwork; the Rich, still more wretchedly, of Idleness, Satiety, and Overgrowth. The Highest in rank, at length, without honor from the Lowest; scarcely, with a little mouth-honor, as from tavern-waiters who expect to put it in the bill. Once-sacred Symbols fluttering as empty Pageants, whereof men grudge even the expense; a World becoming dismantled: in one word, the STATE fallen speechless, from obesity and apoplexy; the STATE shrunken into a Police-Office, straitened to get its pay!"

We might ask, are there many "observant eyes," belonging to practical men in England or elsewhere, which have descried these phenomena; or is it only from the mystic elevation of a German *Wahngasse* that such wonders are visible? Teufelsdröckh contends that the aspect of a "deceased or expiring Society" fronts us everywhere, so that whoso runs may read. "What, for example," says he, "is the universally arrogated Virtue, almost the sole remaining Catholic Virtue, of these days? For some half-century, it has been the thing you name 'Independence.' Suspicion of 'Servility,' of reverence for Superiors, the very dog-leech is anxious to disavow. Fools! Were your Superiors worthy to govern, and you worthy to obey, reverence for them were even your only possible freedom. Independence, in all kinds, is rebellion; if unjust rebellion, why parade it, and everywhere prescribe it?"

But what then? Are we returning, as Rousseau prayed, to the state of Nature? "The Soul Politic having departed," says Teufelsdröckh, "what can follow but that the Body Politic be decently interred, to avoid putrescence? Liberals, Economists, Utilitarians enough I see marching with its bier, and chanting loud paeans, towards the funeral pile, where, amid wailings from some, and saturnalian revelries from the most, the venerable Corpse is to be burnt. Or, in plain words, that these men, Liberals, Utilitarians,

or whatsoever they are called, will ultimately carry their point, and dis sever and destroy most existing Institutions of Society, seems a thing which has some time ago ceased to be doubtful.

"Do we not see a little subdivision of the grand Utilitarian Armament come to light even in insulated England? A living nucleus, that will attract and grow, does at length appear there also; and under curious phasis; properly as the inconsiderable fag-end, and so far in the rear of the others as to fancy itself the van. Our European Mechanizers are a sect of boundless diffusion, activity, and co-operative spirit: has not Utilitarianism flourished in high places of Thought, here among ourselves, and in every European country, at some time or other, within the last fifty years? If now in all countries, except perhaps England, it has ceased to flourish, or indeed to exist, among Thinkers, and sunk to Journalists and the popular mass,—who sees not that, as hereby it no longer preaches, so the reason is, it now needs no Preaching, but is in full universal Action, the doctrine everywhere known, and enthusiastically laid to heart? The fit pabulum, in these times, for a certain rugged workshop intellect and heart, nowise without their corresponding workshop strength and ferocity, it requires but to be stated in such scenes to make proselytes enough.—Admirably calculated for destroying, only not for rebuilding! It spreads like a sort of Dog-madness; till the whole World-kennel will be rabid: then woe to the Huntsmen, with or without their whips! They should have given the quadrupeds water," adds he; "the water, namely, of Knowledge and of Life, while it was yet time."

Thus, if Professor Teufelsdröckh can be relied on, we are at this hour in a most critical condition; beleaguered by that boundless "Armament of Mechanizers" and Unbelievers, threatening to strip us bare! "The World," says he, "as it needs must, is under a process of devastation and waste, which, whether by silent assiduous corrosion, or open quicker combustion, as the case chances, will effectually enough annihilate the past Forms of Society; replace them with what it may. For the present, it is contemplated that when man's whole Spiritual Interests are once *divested*, these innumerable stript-off Garments shall mostly be burnt; but the sounder Rags among them be quilted together into one huge Irish watch-coat for the defence of the Body only!"—This, we think, is but Job's-news to the humane reader.

"Nevertheless," cries Teufelsdröckh, "who can hinder it; who is there that can clutch into the wheelspokes of Destiny, and say to the Spirit of the Time: Turn back, I command thee?—Wiser were it that we yielded to the Inevitable and Inexorable, and accounted even this the best."

Nay, might not an attentive Editor, drawing his own inferences from what stands written, conjecture that Teufelsdröckh, individually had yielded to this same "Inevitable and Inexorable" heartily enough; and now sat waiting the issue, with his natural diabolico-angelical Indifference, if not even Placidity? Did we not hear him complain that the World was a "huge Ragfair," and the "rags and tatters of old Symbols" were raining down everywhere, like to drift him in, and suffocate him? What with those "unhunted Helots" of his; and the uneven *sic vos non vobis* pressure and hard-crashing collision he is pleased to discern in existing things; what with the so hateful "empty Masks," full of beetles and spiders, yet glaring out on him, from their glass eyes, "with a ghastly affectation of life,"—we feel entitled to conclude him even willing that much should be thrown to the Devil, so it were but done gently! Safe himself in that "Pinnacle of Weissnichtwo," he would consent, with a tragic solemnity, that the monster UTILITARIA, held back, indeed, and moderated by nose-rings, halters, foot-shackles, and every conceivable modification of rope, should go forth to do her work;—to tread down old ruinous Palaces and Temples with her broad hoof, till the whole were trodden down, that new and better might be built! Remarkable in this point of view are the following sentences.

"Society," says he, "is not dead: that Carcass, which you call dead Society, is but her mortal coil which she has shuffled off, to assume a nobler; she herself, through perpetual metamorphoses, in fairer and fairer development, has to live till Time also merge in Eternity. Wheresoever two or three Living Men are gathered together, there is Society; or there it will be, with its cunning mechanisms and stupendous structures, overspreading this little Globe, and reaching upwards to Heaven and downwards to Gehenna: for always, under one or the other figure, it has two authentic Revelations, of a God and of a Devil; the Pulpit, namely, and the Gallows."

Indeed, we already heard him speak of "Religion, in unnoticed nooks, weaving for herself new Vestures;"—Teufelsdröckh himself being one of the loom-treadles? Elsewhere he quotes without censure that strange aphorism of Saint Simon's, concerning which and whom so much were to be said: "*L'age d'or, qu'une aveugle tradition a placé jusqu'ici dans le passé, est devant nous*, The golden age, which a blind tradition has hitherto placed in the Past, is Before us."—But listen again:—

"When the Phoenix is fanning her funeral pyre, will there not be sparks flying! Alas, some millions of men, and among them such as a Napoleon, have already been licked into that high-eddying Flame, and like moths consumed there. Still also have we to fear that incautious beards will get singed.

"For the rest, in what year of grace such Phoenix-cremation will be completed, you need not ask. The law of Perseverance is among the deepest in man: by nature he hates change; seldom will he quit his old house till it has actually fallen about his ears. Thus have I seen Solemnities linger as Ceremonies, sacred Symbols as idle Pageants, to the extent of three hundred years and more after all life and sacredness had evaporated out of them. And then, finally, what time the Phoenix Death-Birth itself will require, depends on unseen contingencies.—Meanwhile, would Destiny offer Mankind, that after, say two centuries of convulsion and conflagration, more or less vivid, the fire-creation should be accomplished, and we to find ourselves again in a Living Society, and no longer fighting but working,—were it not perhaps prudent in Mankind to strike the bargain?"

Thus is Teufelsdröckh, content that old sick Society should be deliberately burnt (alas, with quite other fuel than spice-wood); in the faith that she is a Phoenix; and that a new heaven-born young one will rise out of her ashes! We ourselves, restricted to the duty of Indicator, shall forbear commentary. Meanwhile, will not the judicious reader shake his head, and reproachfully, yet more in sorrow than in anger, say or think: From a *Doctor utriusque Juris*, titular Professor in a University, and man to whom hitherto, for his services, Society, bad as she is, has given not only food and raiment (of a kind), but books, tobacco and gukuk, we expected more gratitude to his benefactress; and less of a blind trust in the future which resembles that rather of a philosophical Fatalist and Enthusiast, than of a solid householder paying scot-and-lot in a Christian country.