

GEORGE ELIOT once very positively declared that she was not an optimist, but she asserted her willingness to be known as a meliorist. To her the universe was neither wholly good nor wholly bad, but while bad in a large measure was capable of great improvement. This interpretation of the problem of evil was also that given it by George Henry Lewes. More recently Mr. James Sully has taken up the same position in his book on 'Pessimism.' That was a suggestive work and attracted some attention. This small school of thinkers has found an anonymous American author who is a convert to their doctrine. He is a rather feeble imitator, adding little that is new to the discussion. Having devoted much time to the subject he presents many facts bearing on the problem, but they are not thoroughly digested and worked out into satisfactory results. In the first part of his book he gives a *résumé* of the views held on the problem of evil in the ancient and the modern world, and a statement of the positions taken by the leading pessimists and optimists. Part second presents the scientific proofs of antagonism in the physical world, in biology, in mind and in morals. Antagonism in history is considered in part third, and its aid to human development is shown. It is regarded as a chief factor in the process of evolution. Then follows a fourth part on the relations of evil and conflict to the necessary conditions of life, mainly dealing with the environment as it affects man's welfare. A concluding part treats of the social, moral and religious aspects of the subject.

The book contains a vast accumulation of facts, and if it had a good index it might be quite serviceable as a work of reference on the theme it discusses. It also largely quotes the opinions of leading philosophers and men of science, and as a collection of such opinions has a considerable value. The author has little discrimination in his quotations, however, and extracts from the most indifferent writers almost as readily as from the best. He is a very decided agnostic, and for the most part echoes the leaders of that school. A good specimen of his philosophy is contained in these words: 'Religion, like morality, had its origin in utility pure and simple.' He is a somewhat crude evolutionist, looking to science as the only true guide and redeemer for man. The deeper philosophical bearings of the problem of evil are not touched here, but rather its surface and more apparent facts. The grounds of optimism are not stated with that real meaning which they have for many of the leading thinkers of modern times. Nor is Calvinism considered as a form of pessimism which has a large reason for existence both in philosophy and in the facts of human experience. Meliorism may be accepted as a good statement of the facts in their natural order, but it is an explanation which is no explanation of the phenomena of evil. It is, in fact, the conclusion of agnosticism, that no explanation is to be had.

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\* *Conflict in Nature and Life: A Study of Antagonism in the Constitution of Things.* New York: D. Appleton and Company.