

DONNELLY'S

"RAGNAROK"

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BY

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DONNELLY'S "RAGNAROK." *

RAGNAROK in Scandinavian mythology, is the "Twilight of the Gods," or the end of the world. It is generally interpreted as a prophetic description of the final conflict between good and evil; the passing away of one order or plane of life, and the beginning of another; the "Twilight of the Gods" referring to the moral and spiritual darkness and desolation in which the world will be plunged when the old order is about to give place to the new.

The word in its definition corresponds to the Hindoo conception of the end of a Brahma-Kalpa or Manvantara, an immeasurable period of time when the destructive and constructive forces of nature are in full play, when one order of things passes away, and a new order is established; not gradually, through the ordinary processes of evolution, but suddenly, through the stored up explosive energy of great cyclic processes, when cosmical, planetary, and social forces unite in effecting world-wide changes. These periods are the crises, or climaxes, of evolutionary activity, when Brahma, the Creative Energy of nature, awakens, and new impulses are infused into the ordinary currents of the world's life. When these great creative periods pass, and a new cycle replaces the old, then Brahma sleeps again, and on a higher plane of life evolution pursues its wonted course.

The same idea, more literally expressed, is found in the Hebrew Scriptures in the prophecy of the destruction of the world, the present cycle, and second coming of Christ.

While the cataclysmic processes which Ragnarok represents, are believed by many to refer to the closing years of the present cycle, when the tenth and final "Avatar of Vishnu"—a new incarnation of Creative Life—is to take place, and the old order of things destroyed, Ignatius Donnelly applies them

*Ragnarok, the Age of Fire and Gravel. By Ignatius Donnelly, 8vo, cloth, 441 pp., \$2.00. D. Appleton & Co., New York.

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to the remote past, when the first great cycle in human experience had reached its zenith, and a new cycle was about to begin. He does so, not ignoring the fact that inasmuch as history repeats itself, that which has been may be again.

This fact is brought out very clearly by Mr. Donnelly when, tracing the correspondence between the moral eclipse and fall of the race, and the great catastrophe, he quotes from the Elder Edda:

Brothers will fight together,
And become each other's bane ;
Sister's children their sib shall spoil.
Hard is the world ;
Sensual sins grow huge.
There are axe ages, sword ages,
Shields cleft in twain ;
There are wind ages, murder ages,
Ere the world falls dead.

He then adds: "If we fall again upon 'Axe ages, sword ages'; if 'sensual sins grow huge', if brother spoils brother, if Sodom and Gomorrah come again, who can say that God may not bring again out of the depths of space a regenerating comet."

Pervading the book is the old oriental karmic idea of ethical retribution, rooted in universal law influencing the whole economy of the universe, and in its aggregate capacity determining the fate of nations and of the globe itself.

"As ye sow, so shall ye reap," is the expression of an occult law that sends its trailing network of influences from the individual to the whole planetary system.

Nothing stands alone. Like attracts like, and the dominating keynote of the human soul sets in responsive vibrations world-wide elemental forces that change the social conditions, geography and climate of the world.

According to Mr. Donnelly, the first condition of mankind was sinless. Between the creation of man and his fall, a vast interval of time intervened, and during this period the race attained a high degree of civilization. This was the Golden

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Age of perfect happiness, when man was one with God, and the soul inspired knowledge as the lungs inspire air.

Perpetual spring reigned; cold and storms were unknown; the earth brought forth spontaneously fruits and flowers, and joy and happiness reigned supreme.

This condition of primitive man was what Swedenborg called "The most ancient church," the word "church" merely signifying the exalted spiritual plane of the race.

Gradually, very gradually, a change took place, a change marked not by years, but by centuries. The germs of evil latent within the soul — germs derived from an animal ancestry — began to develop; the lower nature with its appetites and passions encroached on the higher; darkened its intelligence, and blotted out its intuitive forces through which knowledge had been received. Man fell. Lower and lower sank the race, until a climax of wickedness was reached. Men became human monsters, living only for selfish, sensual gratification. The warmth and light of love had left the soul, the icy rigors of sin and death had entered it. The world had ripened for destruction, — the end had come. The first cycle of human existence had expired — a new cycle was about to begin.

Suddenly as a bolt from a clear sky, came the collision between the earth and a comet that changed the whole face of nature and destroyed all but a fragment of the human race. The chaos of social conditions had become part of the chaos of an epoch of world-wide destruction.

The blow dealt, the earth changed the angle of inclination of the earth's axis that up to that time was perpendicular to the plane of its orbit, revolutionized the climate of the globe, destroyed the warm climate of the tertiary period where fruits and flowers flourished within the present Arctic circle.

Paradise was at an end. No longer existing in the soul, it ceased to exist on earth. Storms and tempests, howling winds and driving snows, the terrible combat of man with nature, the still more terrible strife of man with man, in the fierce struggle for existence, took the place of the summer warmth and peace of the long Edenic state.

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The lurid, awful beauty of the following description of the "crash of matter and the shock of worlds," can hardly be matched in literature :

The arrested motion of the comet was converted into heat. A vast heat preceded the fall of the debris of the comet by a few minutes or hours. As the comet entered the earth's atmosphere and combined with it, it emitted thunders, roarings, and hissings that shook the globe.

Then came the fall of stones, gravel, and clay dust, darkening the heavens, leveling valleys, tearing down hills. The gases of the comet fall in great volumes on the earth; they ignite, and the glare of a Titanic conflagration rises. The earth is on fire. The rivers, lakes, the ocean itself, evaporate.

For years the heat lasts, but gradually it abates; then electrical action begins; condensation commences, clouds form, the veil between the earth and the sun grows denser. The sun's rays are shut out. More condensation follows. The cold increases. The heat has carried up one-fourth of all the water of the world into the air. Now it is condensed into a black cloud. A fall of dense clouds, miles in thickness, enfolds the earth. No sun, no moon, no stars are to be seen.

Day has ceased to be. Then the outward atmosphere begins to discharge itself. The great work of restoring the waters of the ocean to the ocean begins. It grows colder, colder, colder. The glacial age has set in. The pouring rain turns into snow. Gigantic snow beds are formed, which gradually solidify into ice. Glaciers enter the valleys; the temperate regions become Arctic.

In the midst of this darkness, cold, and snow, the remnants of humanity wander over a desolated darkened world, living on the barks of trees, or on the bodies of animals. For years the rain and snows fall, and as the clouds are drained they become thinner and the light increases.

At last the great luminary breaks through the clouds and looks again upon the wrecked earth. The mild eternal summer of the Tertiary age is gone, the battle between sun and ice continues. Every north wind brings us the breath of the snow, every south wind is part of the sun's contribution to undo the comet's work. A continued amelioration of climate has been going on since the glacial age, and, if no new catastrophe falls on the earth our remote posterity will yet see the last snow bank of Greenland melted and the climate of the Eocene re-established in Spitzbergen.

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To those who see that nature moves in cycles; that all human progress is in an ascending spiral: and that in the revolutions of these spiral movements, we touch and reproduce many of the forms and conditions of life through which the race and even the earth have passed, this description of the fall—as the rounding of the first great cycle of human existence—is filled with deepest meaning. It shows that when a climax in civilization has been reached, and a cycle completed, that the fall from the height attained is repeated; that sensuality and corruption again gain the mastery over the higher nature; that these corrupt conditions spread through every part of social life, until they undermine the fabric of government and the life of the nation.

This world-wide climax in human development has now been reached; the age has culminated; a great cycle of time dating from the fall, has nearly rounded or completed itself, and a new cycle is in process of development.

The arc of the circle is approaching a point, corresponding to the crucial point in the preceding cycle. The orbit of civilization is passing into what may be called a cold region in space. Disturbed conditions will increase until the developing forces of a new age supersede the old, and adaptation is established between man and his new environment.

The cycle now passing has expressed a plane of life in which the lower animal propensities have dominated the higher and distinctively human qualities.

It has been marked by the same struggle for existence that prevails in the animal world. The history of that struggle has been the destruction of the weak and survival of the strong. Its different stages have been marked by military, priestly, imperial, and competitio-industrial rule in which the people are held in subjugation by a dominating class.

Competitive industrialism, the latest, and in some respects the most terrible phase of the struggle for existence, has culminated in monopoly—the combination of the strong against the welfare and happiness of the race.

This is the apotheosis of crime and inhumanity before

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which the world is asked to bow down and worship. It marks the turning point of civilization, either a reversal to lower conditions in which all that has been gained through the ages in the way of freedom and progress will be lost, or else the overthrow of monopoly and the beginning of new and higher social conditions.

Right here is the point of danger — the inevitable conflict between the old régime and the new — a conflict that is in the nature of things and cannot be avoided or long delayed.

“Over the events of life,” says Draper, “we may have control, but none whatever over the laws of its progress. There is a geometry that applies to nations an equation of their course of advance that no mortal can touch.”

Were our vision finer, and could we see more clearly into the laws governing human progress we would be able to measure to a mathematical fraction the amount of friction that the change will involve. On one side stand all the traditions, laws, customs, and vested interests of the ages; all the great institutions of learning; the press, the pulpit, the school, the college, that are interlinked with the prevailing social system and form the basis of its support.

Resting upon this mighty foundation of stratified thought is the competitive industrial system that has reached its apex of power in monopoly and in the creation of a powerful plutocracy controlling the avenues of education and of trade and the administration of the government.

These form an almost invulnerable bulwark against the progressive forces of the times.

On the other side is the stupendous incontrovertible fact that in the culmination of the competitive system in monopoly, a point has been reached where increasing crime, debauched morals, and the growing poverty and wretchedness of the people will render a continuance of the system impossible.

In this great change that is now impending, not only will the classes and the masses meet in a life and death struggle, but as the great wave of western civilization sweeps round to the point from whence it started, and the East becomes the

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battle scene of the warring nations of the world, then will also begin the colossal strife that will change not only domestic institutions, but the map of the world.

And this world crisis, this dying old age and dawning new one, this shaking of thrones, principalities, and powers, marks the beginning of that august period known as the second coming of Christ.

Just as the first physical advent was inevitable to the consummation of the old pagan world, and the ushering in of the Christian dispensation, so the second and spiritual advent is inevitable to the consummation of this age and the beginning of the new.

We are rapidly moving forward out of the old Adamic cycle of the "fall," into the Christ cycle of redemption, with its social expressions of "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity," so that as the great struggle between light and darkness, Ormuzd and Ahriman, takes place, and the "Twilight of the Gods" again darkens the earth — we will know that it is the darkness that precedes the dawn of a new day in which Paradise will be regained, never more to be lost.

Ignatius Donnelly has written a remarkable book; a book that every one who is interested in metaphysical and sociological questions should read and closely study. For in the ever recurring cycles of existence that which has been will in some shape or form be again, until we pass from off the plane and out of the circle of experiences where they occur.

IMOGENE C. FALES.

Bensonhurst, New York.

The ARENA

A MONTHLY REVIEW OF
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PROGRAM FOR 1899.

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