

# Chapter 02

## Self-Preservation

1863

**People :**

Author : Josiah Warren

**Text :**

# INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER II.

88. Words, though they are *things* themselves, are mainly the *signs* of things.

89. We see the sign of "Dry Goods." The sign is exceedingly well executed, but it gives us no adequate idea of the goods within; no one would order any quantity of them before going within to examine the *things* to which the sign referred.

90. My words here are intended to be the signs of ideas or facts; but even the best-chosen and best-arranged words are full of ambiguity and imperfections, and it is unsafe for a reader to take it for granted that the writer on a subject of v vital interest can do everything for him. There is a part which the reader is obliged to act for himself; that is, to look beyond or within the mere words or signs for the idea intended to be conveyed With this precaution kept vividly before the reader, the mere execution of the *sign* is of secondary importance. Delicious foreign fruits and spices are brought to us in very rough and crude envelopes; but they are the best the *conditions* of their producers afford, and we are content to get our figs, our dates and cinnamon without much regard to the mats in which they are conveyed to us.

# CHAPTER II.

## SELF-PRESERVATION.

91. Before we begin to probe the festering mass now called "civilization," let us prepare ourselves with all the spirit of forbearance which the case allows, that we need not add any *unnecessary* pangs to the already exhausted and dying patient.

92. " I know," says B., " that you do not admit *analogies as proof*, but is there not some indication of the Divine Law in the large fishes eating up the little ones, and in spiders spinning webs to entrap flies? Is not this the work of the Deity, who is all perfection, and can we hope to alter these things permanently for the better?

93. *Ans.* Are we willing to admit from the first glance at analogies that the law for fishes and insects is also the law for cultivated, civilized man!

94. Cultivation is as much the law for man as primitive crudity is. But suppose we admit that the same law governs men, fishes, and insects -- What *is* that law which is inherent and indestructible in all? It is the instinct of *self-preservation*. Fishes and insects would not perhaps eat each other raw and alive, if, like man, they had the means of preparation and cooking; nor would they run the risk, nor take the trouble of pursuing each other in continuous warfare, if, like men, they had more safe or expeditious modes of preserving their existence. It is our particular privilege to have an abundance of superior modes, and it is only for want of the appreciation of them, or when cut off from them by casualties that we are driven to the level of fishes and spiders. Although we cannot tall: at all without resorting to analogies to illustrate our meaning, nothing is more likely to lead us astray when they are too readily accepted as parallels.

95. As far as I know' every thing and person is invested with some *peculiarities*, which constitute its, his, or her INDIVIDUALITY: and it is not safe for us to lose sight of this for a moment in our intercourse with each other. The fishes, the insects, and perhaps all animals, man included, act according, to their external and internal CONDITIONS.

96. This is one Divine Law,\* self-preservation is another Divine or primitive law. The modes of living and eating are not *laws*, but customs, or habits, or expedients, and are subject to modifications as *conditions change*.

97. The carefully bred and cultivated, and *well-conditioned* man or woman who would take pains to extricate a fly from a spider's web, or who would Sit up all night to keep the flies away from a sick infant, or to wet its lips occasionally, and who from pure humanitarian feelings would almost sicken at the idea of eating the

smallest morsel of nicely cooked veal, might, in the frenzy of starvation on a wrecked vessel, involuntarily seize and devour with frightful voracity a portion of a fellow-passenger, even a dear friend, from the sheer, uncontrollable instinct of *self-preservation!*

98. Such is the overwhelming power of CONDITIONS! The same instinct is at work in both opposite cases: in the most delicate attentions to the happiness of others, pleasure is derived in proportion to the pleasure conferred or the pain averted; which, for want of better phraseology, may be ranked as one of the modes of pursuing happiness, or of the promptings of the instinct of self-satisfaction or self-preservation -- exactly *the same instinct* that leads to such opposite results under other conditions.

99. Self-preservation is the law of fish, of insects, and of Men and Women, but let us take care that we do not *assume an accident to be a law*, and so content ourselves to remain on a level with worms and bugs. Our immense resources are as natural, as much (*the law*) to us as the want of them is to insects; and it is by using them that we have thus far ameliorated our *condition*; and, by still greater and better uses of them, we *may* reach an infinitely higher plane, or modes of life, than any ever yet realized. It is the difference in our *capacities* for improvement, not in the fundamental or primitive laws, that lead to such different results.

100. I know that Krinklum Scraggs is an habitual villain, but he has been made a villain by his *conditions*; he does not deserve *punishment* but he must be restrained.

## *footnotes*

\* The Divine, as I understand and use the word, means, simply, the *not human*. The sun, the winds, the tides, electricity, and whatever else exists without the aid of man are of *Divine* origin -- that is, not of human origin.

I prefer however, in order to avoid ambiguity and misunderstanding, to distinguish all these as belonging to *primitive* nature, and the works of man as of the *secondary* nature. Hence may arise the phrases *primitive sphere*, and *secondary sphere*.

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