THE ETHICAL MOVEMENT

ITS PRINCIPLES AND AIMS

The Ethical Movement

Its Principles and Aims

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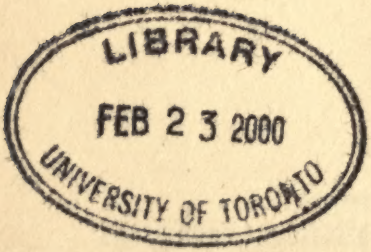

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Editor's Preface

THE Council of the English Union of Ethical Societies, in May of last year, appointed a Committee to prepare a volume in exposition of the Statement of Principles which is incorporated in its Constitution. This book is the outcome of the Committee's work.

There may be occasion to explain the fact that joint authorship is claimed throughout. The reason is that, before each chapter was written, the four contributors whose names appear on the title-page met and discussed the theme of which it was to treat, and even decided, to a great extent, what specific points should be dealt with in it. Then a draft of the chapter was written by some one of us, and submitted at a later meeting; and, where it was thought advisable, modifications were proposed and adopted. In these conferences we had the assistance of Mr. Gustav Spiller, to whom we are deeply indebted for much valuable help.

The unanimity of opinion among us was for the most part so marked that the question as to who had drafted each chapter became wholly subordinate. The ideas belonged to all of us in common, and even turns of expression often seemed not to have emanated from one more than another of us. This was quite natural, since we had all been working for a number of years as organisers and lecturers in Ethical Societies, and these meetings were by no means the first in which we had helped to beat out what we judged to be the main outlines of the Ethical Movement. Indeed, all the writers

of this book had taken part in the long series of conferences of the special Committee which was appointed by the Council of the Union of Ethical Societies several years ago to formulate the Principles of which this book treats. Accordingly, in meeting together for the preparation of these pages, we were working upon what was to us old rather than new ground.

In drawing their work to a close, the writers have a sense that their own unanimity in ethical conviction illustrates a like agreement—deep and real, though not yet fully formulated—among all the members of Ethical Societies, and that this book will prove an added bond of union throughout the Movement.

H. J. B.

London.
May 1st, 1911.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

There is no Ethical Movement, properly so called, except in the Ethical Societies.—A movement must be purely humanistic and naturalistic to be ethical in the strict sense.—Good character a social product.—Sufficiency of social causes to redeem the world.—Kindred movements: Modernism; the New Theology; Christian Science, etc.—Close kinship of Positivism to the Ethical Movement.—Differences between the two: Positivism the product of one mind; too conscious of fact, not conscious enough of the norm or standard; its confusion of thought between actual and ideal humanity; too closely attached to Roman Catholic polity; anti-psychological; its ethics not systematised.—No single person pre-eminent in the Ethical Movement.—No one writer or thinker inspired it.—Its attitude towards ethical literature.—Relation between it and movements for specific reforms.—Why we have Principles but no creed.—Danger of creeds.—Value of formulated principles.—Evolution within the Ethical Movement.—Its relation to life in general.

The following are the Principles of the Union of Ethical Societies, of which this volume treats:—

(*a*) In all the relations of life—personal, social and political—the moral factor should be the supreme consideration.

(*b*) The love of goodness and the love of one's fellows are the true motives for right conduct; and self-reliance and co-operation are the true sources of help.

(*c*) Knowledge of the Right has been evolving through the experience of the human race: therefore the moral obligations generally accepted by the most civilised communities should be taken as the starting-point in the advocacy of a progressive ideal of personal and social righteousness.

(*d*) For each individual, after due consideration of the convictions of others, the final authority as to the right or wrong of any opinion or action should be his own conscientious and reasoned judgment.

(*e*) The well-being of society requires such economic and other conditions as afford the largest scope for the moral development of all its members.

(*f*) The scientific method should be applied in studying the facts of the moral life.

(*g*) The moral life involves neither acceptance nor rejection of belief in any deity, personal or impersonal, or in a life after death.

(*h*) The acceptance of any one ultimate criterion of right should not be made a condition of ethical fellowship.

(*i*) Ethical Fellowships are the most powerful means of encouraging the knowledge and love of right principles of conduct, and of giving the strength of character necessary to realise them in action.

It is sometimes asserted that there is a large and general ethical movement throughout modern life, and that of this movement the organisations called Ethical Societies are only a small part. But a discriminating and systematic observation does not justify such a statement. It is not a fact. Except the Ethical Societies, there is nothing in the nature of an organised effort in our day towards (*a*) the emphasis of good character and right conduct as the chief redemptive agencies in personal and social life, and at

the same time towards (*b*) the disuse of appeal to motives which imply the existence of a personal Creator and the continuance of individual life after death.

That there are many organised efforts based upon the conception of character as the mainspring to all enduring reforms of social evil, that there is in this sense an emphasis of morality as the supreme factor in human life, cannot be denied. But a movement does not become distinctively ethical, and therefore does not deserve to be so designated, unless the sanctions to character which are appealed to are purely humanistic and naturalistic. The old-fashioned appeal to the fear of eternal torments undoubtedly emphasised the supreme importance of good character and right conduct. So did the teaching of intellectualistic belief in Jesus and the power of his blood to wash our sins away. Likewise the doctrine of the Last Judgment, and of eternal bliss for the righteous believer. These were all ethical movements, if nothing more is needed to justify that epithet than the emphasis of personal and social righteousness. If the test of "ethical" be not the use of sanctions derived wholly from the significance of morality in the personal and social life of human beings on earth, then the Churches, in the periods when they have appealed most potently to the fear of hell, the hope of heaven, and the dread of offending an infinite Creator, have been most truly an ethical movement. If an ethical movement means only that righteousness is the goal, it must be conceded that the Salvation Army, the Wesleyan revival, the Quaker agitation, the Lutheran revolt, the crusade of Savonarola—indeed, as we have said, all the activities of the Christian Churches when they have been most energetic—were ethical movements. But if this be so, why were they never until our day designated as "ethical"? The word is new. Until the appearance of Ethical Societies upon the stage, we heard much of

Christian character and Christian conduct, of the spiritual life, of religious discipline; but never throughout the Old and New Testament, or in all the literature of two thousand years, until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, was a movement called "ethical" simply because it set up righteousness as its goal. It is quite clear, then, that the increasing use of the term must be due to something else; and that that something else is undoubtedly the new idea that the right life can find adequate motives, sufficient incentives, in the Here and Now.

The world is beginning to learn that good character is always generated by spiritual energies streaming in upon it from the emotional and volitional environment of the human society round about it. Both goodness and badness are wholly caused by the formative influences of the psychic *milieu*, human and natural, which has given birth to, and which nourishes or starves and poisons, the inmost spirit of each new human centre of moral agency. If it be true that there is no such thing as an uncaused or spontaneous generation of moral character, or—which is to say the same thing in another way—no fresh start or improvement in character due to some superhuman and supernatural influx of redemptive power, then it stands to reason that an organised effort to generate and strengthen good character has no claim to the word ethical unless it depends wholly upon the inherent spiritual agencies, active or latent, within the social environment of the individual. It is because of a belief in the principle that the whole causation of the love of righteousness and the practice of it and the knowledge of it is human and natural, that the Ethical Movement believes itself to have a unique mission in the world, a mission which no other organisation has seen fit to undertake.

The belief in the natural and human causation of moral character would not of itself inspire a mission, if it were

not accompanied by the kindred conviction that this causation is wholly adequate to redeem the world. We recognise the self-sufficiency, as a redeeming power, of social insight and activity. But this faith cannot demonstrate its reasonableness to one who has not attempted to redeem wholly by means of incentives furnished by the life of man on earth. We cannot prove, to one who will not experiment in this direction for himself, but we can declare our own experience, that the more the redemptive energies latent in man under nature are disclosed to us and brought into service, the deeper grows our sense of the practically infinite abundance of the powers immanent in man and nature to put an end to human misery and sin.

A brief mention of the various organised trends of humanistic effort in our day will adequately demonstrate the truth of the assertion that, except in the organisations called Ethical Societies, our age is not marked by any ethical movement.

Probably nothing gave greater promise of being such an enterprise than Modernism within the Roman Catholic Church, under the guidance and inspiration of Father Tyrrell. But his posthumous work, *Christianity at the Cross-Roads*, discloses the fact that his Modernism wholly repudiates the evolutionary and ethical interpretation of Christianity. He rejects it with scorn, and insists that the Catholic Church, as well as the Gospels and the personality who inspired them, are, and always have been, the advocates of other-worldliness. He maintains that the actualisation of moral ideals in men's hearts and in social institutions is in the nature of the case an impossibility on earth, and that any religion which is not a mockery to man must point him to a realm that transcends not only the life of the senses but the life of creative moral activity in families and States. Here, then, for all its emphasis of

righteousness, there is no ethical movement, but only a using of the ethical life as a means of drawing men's souls back into a realm that scorns any possible achievement of human effort in mundane society.

Likewise, the New Theology movement has of late increasingly committed itself to what it counts higher than morality. It even boasts that its message is super-ethical. The visions, the enjoyments, the realities it proffers to the world, are beyond good and evil, and the approach to them is not simply the straight and narrow road of duty and right. Whoever has read in the *Hibbert Journal* for April, 1911, the article entitled "Beyond Morality," by the Rev. Mr. Lewis, the chief colleague of Mr. Campbell at the King's Weigh House Church, London, and knows its teachings to be typical of the "Liberal Christian" movement, will acknowledge our justification in withholding the name "ethical" from the New Theology. When it first began to proclaim itself, it seemed to be distinctively an ethical mysticism; but now it has shown itself to be cosmic emotionalism. To be ethical, however, a doctrine must be cosmic volitionalism—that is, it must teach the living out of the innate constitution of all will; the inherent law of the autonomous will is the very subject-matter of the science of ethics. The devotion of men to an actualisation of the inner imperative of the will is the essence of ethical religion. Such a religion must be cosmic, because to a will obeying its own inner law, the cosmos is nothing but its opportunity—the means it must use towards its own end. But cosmic emotionalism arrives at mystic enjoyment by the surrender of its own ends and the deification of the means.

Other movements besides Modernism and the New Theology have even far less foundation for a claim to the term "ethical." Christian Science denies the creative power of the finite will, and its disciples would probably

hurry to repudiate, as if it were a charge against it, the assertion that it was an ethical movement. Faith-Cure, the so-called Higher Thought, and Theosophy, are all movements for the cultivation of moods and insights which boast that they not only transcend the distinction between right and wrong, but that they are activities which scarcely have any bearing upon this distinction. The cultivation of occult faculties is not the cultivation of conscience, and does not pretend to be; but rather the cultivation of something else which supplements and quickens and enlarges the soul, and may thus incidentally quicken conscience itself; but it is no debtor and no servant to the will to serve.

There is one organisation vitally akin to the Ethical Movement, but in our judgment it stands as a predecessor rather than a present-day rival in challenging the allegiance of those whose religion consists in devotion to the moral ideal. The Positivist Society is, in its spirit and aim, very like the Ethical Societies; yet with a difference that can best be described as that between an earlier form —a first draft, so to speak, of the same design—and a later elaboration. Because of its vital kinship with our Ethical Movement, and because no better way could be adopted of presenting briefly some essential features of the Ethical Movement, it is befitting that in this volume on our aims and principles more than a passing word should be devoted to the differences between it and us. Unless the differences are radical and essential, the Ethical Movement, being the younger, could not justify its separate existence. The economy of social reform effort requires that there shall be no distinct religious organisation except where there is an inherent difference that renders co-operation self-destructive.

Now, the whole Positivist system emanated from the effort of one mind alone—that of Auguste Comte.

We count it characteristic of the finer and more organic insight and methods of the two generations succeeding Comte not to imagine that one man in isolation, however sublime his vision and original his genius, can anticipate in detail the future religious and political reorganisation of humanity. If in three hundred years, with the co-operation of hundreds of thousands, the Ethical Societies have elaborated their scheme of social reconstruction as comprehensively and minutely as Comte alone elaborated his polity in the last few years of his life, they will have done well. They will have moved as rapidly as did the Christian Church in the first centuries of its existence.

One instance of Comte's premature detail in polity was his acceptance of the separation of Church and State as a finality. We agree that, while religion remains super-naturalistic in sanctions and other-worldly in outlook, it should be left to private enterprise. But when it becomes naturalistic in means and goal, and makes moral idealism its distinctive domain, why should it not become the highest concern of the State? The best trend of political evolution is towards the State organisation of education, both general and special, both for children and adults; and all pedagogical experts recognise it as an error to confine education chiefly to a training of the intellect and a presentation of facts. The State has strong reasons for cultivating the hearts of men and directing and strengthening their will-power. Now, such teaching is the very task of naturalistic religion.

Another error, which we need not stress here, is Comte's acceptance of the private ownership of land and capital as an economic finality.

A further defect, from our point of view, of Positivism is that its very name over-emphasises mere fact. A religion must be more conscious of the norm or standard, the ideal and goal, than the word "Positivism" suggests.

Although we accept wholly the realism of verifiable science as the solid ground on which we are to build, the form and meaning and beauty which our sympathetic and creative imagination are to contribute are not positivistic. Even the use of the word "humanity," unqualified, squints, so to speak. It is not positive humanity which is or can be the inspiration to the new social order, but ideal humanity. It is not what humanity is, but what humanity ought to be and is not yet, although it can be, that will overcome the baser selfishness of a narrow egoism. What is more, the moral ideal is a universal conception, that would apply to any rational agency and any community of spiritual intelligences; so that the root of the inspiration of the Ethical Movement is something of which positive or even ideal humanity is only one instance and illustration. The moral ideal, from the point of view of critical philosophy, stands to humanity as the science of number stands to the concrete instances furnished by physics and astronomy. Yet Positivism, on account of Comte's lack of discrimination here, can never free itself from a fundamental confusion of thought. It can never extricate the essential and universal nature of the moral life from the accidental experiences and line of evolution of positive history. It will always be committed to the conception of religion as the empire of the dead over the living, instead of the living over the dead in the interests of the yet unborn. Because of its veneration of positive humanity, it will always, despite its assent to the principle of progress, be essentially conservative and static, if not retrogressive.

Positivism, again, both the name and the actual organisation, has been too closely identified by Auguste Comte with the agnostic attitude towards the question as to the ultimate reality of existence and the relation of thought to being. But this point cannot be elaborated here.

The Positivism emanating from Auguste Comte also attaches itself too closely to that particular and relatively local and provincial movement which embodied itself in the Roman Catholic Church. Positivism overlooks the contribution of ancient Greece to the world's insight and power. The Ethical Movement must be as much Greek in its tone and character, in its ethics and politics, as Roman. Positivism gives little encouragement to that spirit of democratic liberty and quality which animates the people of Germany, America, and England to-day. Comte saw only the destructive and individualistic spirit in democracy. He lived before the constructive consciousness of the proletariate and of women had begun to awaken.

In fact, any Positivistic movement that is chiefly indebted to Auguste Comte must inevitably lack psychological depth, for one of Comte's basic principles was the impossibility of a psychologic science based upon direct insight and introspection. The reconstruction of religion by a man who denied introspection must inevitably have been a dead thing; and in the eyes of those who, despite the existence of Positivistic Churches of Humanity, founded Ethical Societies, the Positivist Movement was premature and stillborn.

Not only did Comte deny the possibility of a science of psychology based on introspection: so little did he differentiate ethics, the science of rational choice, from religion, politics, economics, and other concrete manifestations of human interest, that he never attempted to write on ethics as such. One of the most distinguished of English Positivists used to deplore that Comte died before he had written a great work on ethics. This disciple was wont to affirm that the progress of humanity may have been delayed five hundred years in its religious and moral evolution by such an untoward omission on Comte's

part. But what a concession to the Ethical Movement, whose chief object is to do that which has not yet been done! Whether Comte could have done it or not, our task is to interest the geniuses of the world in the advancement of ethics. It is quite possible that we shall thus do in a century what we are not sure that Comte was capable of doing at all.

No one thinker holds any such pre-eminence in the sentiments and the gratitude of members of Ethical Societies as Auguste Comte receives from those who name themselves Positivists. The founder of the Ethical Movement was Felix Adler, the son of a Jewish Rabbi. He was trained to succeed his father, but after a course of study in the universities of Germany, and, as he believed, in response to a crying need of our age, he established, in 1876, in New York City, the first "Society for Ethical Culture." Profound and grateful as is the reverence in which he is held by all his colleagues, his democratic principles, his deference for the moral judgment of others, would have caused him to repel any such dominating control of the thought and policy of the Ethical Movement as Comte assumed in Positivism. He desired that the organisation he had founded should not be a "one-man movement." Like the whole of the democratic trend of our time, like the scientific inspiration of our age, and like many particular movements, such as that of trade unionism and the agitation for the emancipation of women, our Ethical Movement boasts of a diffused sovereignty and prophecy.

It is not only that there is an absence of a tendency to beatify or sanctify or deify the founder of our fellowship: so strong also is our sense of the value of co-operative thinking, feeling and willing among equals, that none even of the master-thinkers or ethical statesmen of the past have been set up as our distinctive patrons. If any philosophy might be said to hold the same relation to us

which Auguste Comte's Positive philosophy holds to the Positivist Movement, it would be that of Immanuel Kant. But it is lucky for us—now that even his philosophy is seen to have defects which render it in great part obsolete —that we have never committed ourselves to him in the way in which the Positivist Societies are pledged to Comte.

Besides Kant, it is almost impossible to mention any one writer or thinker who is universally influential throughout our movement. The Ethical Societies of Germany are of such a trend that it would seem wholly incompatible with their character that they should acknowledge the leadership of any one prophet. Likewise with the societies in America. In England, however, there are some writers who are favourites in Ethical circles: Emerson, Matthew Arnold, Sir John Seeley, Edmund Burke, John Milton.

It is undoubtedly true, as we have already implied, that there are nowadays many movements for specific reforms which are distinctly ethical. Such are the reforms for which the political parties stand, or societies which call attention to some definite wrong which needs to be righted. But these particularised efforts omit all reference to universal and primary principles. As the Ethical Movement, consisting of Ethical Societies, calls attention supremely to the fundamentals, it belongs to a different category. The Eugenics Education Society, the Society for the Abolition of Capital Punishment, those for the political emancipation of women—these can in no wise compete with ethical organisations, nor see in them rivals or antagonists. On the contrary, Ethical Societies need to be supplemented by specific moral reform movements, and moral reform movements constantly require the inspiration and illumination which a movement

devoted to the presentation and worship of the moral ideal supplies.

But the relation of these specific moral reforms to our movement must be more fully set out; otherwise the reader of this volume who has not also first-hand knowledge of our organisation could never understand its special mission and its limits.

We are often asked by unsympathetic critics, "What good works, do you, as a society, perform? You call yourselves an Ethical Movement; but can you make good your claim to the name, if your chief energies are spent in talking rather than in doing—in pointing others to the good life rather than exemplifying it in your own fellowship?" Now, we have never met with any fair-minded critic of this sort who has not been more than satisfied with our answer, which is this:—

Specific moral reforms are enterprises which can be undertaken by people with various views concerning religion and the fundamental problems of life and duty; they therefore should not be undertaken by bodies, like an Ethical Society, which stand for universal principles, for a point of view, for a special synthesis of all the factors of life. Why should members of Ethical Societies build a hospital of their own and manage it themselves, instead of giving their contributions to the hospitals to which all humanely disposed persons in the community might render support? Why should an Ethical Society have among its women a special woman's suffrage section, instead of urging all its women members to join in the great organisations that have been formed irrespective of peculiar views on life and philosophy in general?

Yet it would be far from the truth to suppose that an Ethical Society stands only for universal principles, and only for talk. It also is a specific moral reform. It is a mighty and a very definite work to promulgate the

principles set forth in the Constitution of the Union of Ethical Societies, and at the same time to draw into a fellowship in the moral life all persons who share our convictions. We are a teaching body; and who would be so foolish as to maintain that teachers are doing no practical work? We are teachers in the deeper sense of the word —not simply sharpening intellectual discernment and classifying and co-ordinating the knowledge of people, but also training the heart and giving luminous and rational direction to the will. In our judgment, the members of all classes of society are in dire need of assistance in forming correct moral judgments, in having their attention called to the problems of right and wrong, in having their sympathies widened by the presentation of the claims of classes and nations of men whose humanity and whose service to the world are apt to be overlooked. When so many baser interests of the individual are stimulated by capitalistic syndicates, it is most valuable that there should be an organisation as a counter-irritant, furnishing stimuli to the humaner tendencies of man's nature. If you help a man to clear up his moral ideas, and if you purify his heart, you are doing him, and through him the community, as great a good as if you find him, when out of work, remunerative employment, or, when ill, a bed in a hospital.

This definite work of Ethical Societies will also lead to one very important and yet precise and specific reform. Our aim is to preach and teach and to conduct our ethical meetings in such a way as will ultimately induce the leaders of all the churches of all denominations to modify their forms and ceremonies, their sacraments, their ritual and their preaching, until every church is purely and simply a fellowship in devotion to the cause of the good in the world, barring out no one on account of metaphysical differences, and welcoming all who are ready to

dedicate their wealth and their energies to the service of mankind. This very volume which the Union of Ethical Societies here presents to the public is, from one point of view, a handbook for pastors, in all the denominations of Christianity, for Jewish rabbis, and even for the priests of the religions of the East.

Let us turn now to the consideration of principles in general, and the way in which they differ from creeds.

In common parlance, a creed is a formulation of ideas which are regarded as possessing finality, as referring to a transcendental order of spiritual existence, and as demanding such intellectual assent as one renders to verified statements of fact. In this sense, Ethical Societies have no creed; and they therefore avoid the use of the word in speaking of the ideas for which they stand.

But, on the other hand, in common parlance the word *Principles* has fallen into no such disrepute as the term *creed*. It does not signify ideas which refer to a transcendent order of spiritual existence; it signifies ideals to be actualised in human society under the laws of man's nature and of the physical universe. Principles also presuppose something more than mere intellectual assent. They imply that the man who holds them lives by them. A man may act upon them, and thereby prove himself to be animated by them, even although he does not consciously entertain them. It is, accordingly, consonant with the right use of speech to say that a man's creed may be one thing, but that his principles may be something quite contrary. Principles also presuppose the spontaneous assent of the rational judgment, whereas it is a historic fact that creeds have often been adopted under compulsion. It follows from the above distinctions that the word principles, unlike the word creed, does not point so much to verbal formulation as to the substance of the sentiment

expressed. It implies, in ordinary use, no such sanctity or accuracy in the mere phrases used.

This volume attempts to demonstrate that, while the Ethical Movement has no "creed," it does have very definite, valuable, inspiring and abiding principles. It does have a faith; and it seeks to formulate its sentiments and convictions with the utmost verbal precision conveniently attainable.

The notion prevails among many who have rebelled against the dogmas of the Church, that there is always a danger to liberty and progress the moment any movement aims at precision of expression. This apprehension, however, is well grounded in regard to creeds, but not to principles. It also presupposes a pre-Darwinian state of intelligence among the persons attempting the formulation. Before the method and spirit of evolutionary thought became dominant, there was indeed a danger that any form, either of word or thought or of social practice, should become fixed and final. But since the practice of looking at things from the evolutionary point of view has become widespread and spontaneous, the danger is rather the other way. Instead of too much fixity and finality, we are threatened with too much flux and relativity. Under such circumstances, it becomes a matter of practical wisdom not to be afraid of either extreme—of vagueness or of rigidity. Formulas were made for man, not man for formulas. But to refuse to make new ones when they would be of service to our cause, lest they may some day become our masters, is as foolish as to allow old ones to override us.

The Ethical Movement began—as any vital organism should and does begin—comparatively simple, homogeneous and amorphous. It has now, after existing more than a third of a century in various countries, shown within itself a marked evolution. Since it is not a

material but a social and mental organism, the process has been accompanied by self-consciousness; and out of this has arisen a deliberate effort to formulate intellectually what was already its existing trend, purpose and vision. But it should be distinctly borne in mind by all interested observers of the Ethical Movement that it did not spring out of a formula. It was, so to speak, deeper and richer in its potentialities than it itself knew. Its statements of principle, therefore, are but an expression of its pre-existing self. They did not originally beget it. They must, however, serve it, and they must themselves be modified or discarded the moment they are no longer capable of rendering service.

In this same sense, the Ethical Movement is aware of itself as only an organ or instrument of the common need, purpose and sentiment of the whole modern world. And our members do not mean to forget—as Churches have sometimes done—that religious bodies are made for man, and not man for them. The Church exists for the world, and not the world for the Church; and it ought to continue in any one form only so long as that form serves the whole.

CHAPTER II

THE SUPREMACY OF ETHICS

Vagueness as to the meaning of righteousness.—Definition of "the moral factor."—The universal tendency of moral conduct.—Ethics as science of limits to indulgence of human instinct.—The instincts must be controlled, not eradicated: this the task of religion.—Psychological importance of attention.—Emphasis of morality increases its power to command the will.—Duties we tend to overlook.—Refutation of doctrines opposed to the supremacy of ethics: (*a*) that interpretation of determinism which denies moral responsibility; (*b*) the "materialist conception of history"; (*c*) "art for art's sake."—Degeneracy of ecclesiastical ritual: the true function of ritual.—Extension of morality from the private sphere to social and political life.—Need of ethics in (*a*) commerce, (*b*) politics, and (*c*) international relations.—The outlook for international ethics.

"In all the relations of life—personal, social, and political—the moral factor should be the supreme consideration."

— *First Principle of the Union of Ethical Societies.*

ALTHOUGH it is naturally expected that a religious organisation shall be concerned to emphasise the reality and supremacy of righteousness, yet there prevails almost universally a regrettable vagueness as to what righteousness precisely means; and it is this vagueness which accounts for the scepticism so often expressed nowadays, both as to the meaning and as to the importance of morality. The present volume, being an attempt to elucidate what is implied and summed up in the Principles of the Ethical Movement, cannot perhaps do better than to

set out by defining, briefly and provisionally, what is meant by such a phrase as " the moral factor."

This expression, in the Principle before us, is to be taken as comprehending the whole body of disinterested approvals and disapprovals which human beings entertain or express, with regard to all acts and dispositions of the will and all overt deeds. Not only so, but it includes within its meaning the will which expresses itself in these judgments. We are faced by the fact that all men and women are by nature predisposed to praise certain things and to censure others. To say this is not to affirm the Intuitionist doctrine. According to that doctrine, man is born not merely with a predisposition to judge, but possessed of conscious standards and principles of judgment. The latter theory is highly questionable, and is here neither affirmed nor denied. The tendency to judge, however, is a fact of experience; and, being such a fact, our Principle treats it as an essential constituent of what it declares to be the supreme consideration in life.

Now, when we examine the concrete judgments in which this universal predisposition expresses itself, we find that, broadly speaking, they all take as their standard what, for convenience, may be called Lifewardness. They never express a merely arbitrary whim; they never approve courses of conduct which are known, by the persons making the judgments, to be injurious or destructive to human existence. Opinions differ, and will long differ, as to whether the lines of action which men spontaneously approve can accurately be labelled merely useful, or happiness-producing, or calculated to lead to perfection of character. Numerous knotty problems arise when we attempt to adjust the claims of the individual with those of society. But through all the mists of controversy, through all the disagreements of theorists and the conflicts of rival criteria, it is always plain that the

moral approval of humanity has never been bestowed on any acts or lines of conduct except such as were at least believed to be lifeward in their tendency—conducive to the preservation and well-being of whatever unit of humanity commanded the allegiance of the will expressed in the approval.

The "moral factor," then, is a compendious title for the whole body of concrete moral judgments, the will expressed in them, and the end implied in them. But over what dispositions of human nature is it necessary to assert the supremacy of this factor?

Ethics has sometimes been spoken of as a science of limits; but limits to what? Surely to those propensities of the "natural man" which, if indulged either excessively or under the wrong conditions, would lead to disaster. The subjective basis of religion, as will appear later,* consists of the primal instincts, which are common to man and the sub-human creation. Now, every one of these instincts is excessive in its cravings. There is a point up to which the gratification of each of them is consistent with and conducive to a healthy, harmonious, and desirable condition of individual and social life. The business of ethical religion is to locate that point with precision, and to train the human will and intellect to accept it as the absolute term of the satisfaction of its instinctive craving. Only when men and women have so disciplined themselves that they have ceased even to desire any satisfaction which would involve injury to themselves or others, or would in any way impair their efficiency for social service, is the purpose of religion attained. The will of such a man or woman is, in Kant's immortal phrase, "fit for a universal law."

But the task of creating such a character is not easy. It is a difficulty with which humanity has been grappling

* See below, chap. viii.

ever since it grew to self-consciousness. Not without heavy travail can the volcanic impulses of our nature be directed into and confined within the narrow channels where alone their action is beneficent. We are ourselves, as it were, eruptive centres of the blind titanic forces which have beaten out our cosmic home. One in nature with earth and sun and sky, the unruly energies of these are, in the words of Mr. William Watson, "as warp and weft in our lot." It may be true, as the same singer declares, that—

> We are children of splendour and flame,
> Of shuddering also, and tears;
> Magnificent out of the dust we came,
> And abject from the spheres.

But the dust and the spheres are not moral agencies, nor are they easily yoked to the service of our ideals. And because there is in man the mysterious striving for an elusive good, for ends that are not directly attained by the unthwarted play of cosmic forces within him and without, there arises a war in his members, which has not in many thousand years given place to enduring peace. The enemy is, if you will, man's own lower nature. But that lower nature cannot be destroyed without involving the higher nature in its ruin. Herein lies the error of all ascetic systems. We cannot starve out or destroy our instincts; they die only with the death of the body. Religion must recognise them as its very subject-matter—as the elements in moulding and directing which consists its task. Since they may not be eradicated, they must be, in Tennyson's phrase, "battered with the shocks of doom to shape and use."

Several of our Ethical Societies have declared their mission to be, in relation to the Principle before us, "to *emphasise* the moral factor" in the various relations of life. This formulation is especially in harmony with

recent psychology, from which we learn that the emphasis of anything—the directing of attention to it—is the most powerful means of making that thing vivid and real to the mind. Only within the last generation has the immense importance of attention begun to be understood. Matthew Arnold was among the first to point out its significance as an essential factor in religion. The things a man selects from the thronged universe as the special objects of his attention both indicate and determine his character. The things to which he chiefly attends—the objects upon which he reverently and steadfastly gazes—are by that fact made the God of his religion. By attention, any object grows not only clearer and more definite, but also stronger in alluring the will. Morality, by being emphasised, acquires vividness and reality; and other aspects of life become correspondingly less real, less vivid, less potent in their seductiveness.

The mischief that Satan finds for idle hands is proverbial; but the proverb does not define the facts with sufficient precision. It is not so much the idleness of the hands as the wrong activity of the mind, which is never idle, that is the cause of the mischief. Let a man's attention be focussed upon the service of humanity, through science, or art, or politics, or philanthropy, and his lower instincts will spontaneously be subordinated to the degree consistent with the harmonious balance of the good life. The objects of his attention will constitute a preventive providence, able to keep him from falling. But if no such goal occupies the centre of the field of consciousness, that centre will not remain vacant. The pleasures of appetite, the love of display, the sex instinct, or the hoarding instinct will usurp it, and acquire, beyond even their native potency, the enhanced magnetic force which attention confers upon its object.

Here, then, is our justification for emphasising the

moral factor, and making it the supreme consideration. By placing it in the focal point of vision, we both strengthen it and weaken its rivals.

Another implication of our Principle may be alluded to in this connection. Not only are we liable to fall into positive sin if our attention slumbers or is concentrated upon the wrong objects, but we are also in danger of overlooking the claims of those persons and duties which the more obtrusive aspects of the world tend to exclude from our conscious regard. Great injustice is done, and has always been done, to women, to children, to the lower animals, not so much by actual ill-will as because of the fact that a positive effort of attention is requisite to make their claims upon us definite and convincing. The emphasising, then, of the moral factor involves not only the doing of that which is seen to be our duty, but an alertness of the moral vision, causing us to discern duties which we might easily overlook.

But our Principle needs to be vindicated against certain quasi-philosophic and quasi-scientific doctrines which tend to diminish, if not to destroy, the significance of ethical standards and of ethical appeals. The doctrine of determinism, for example, as interpreted by some very popular writers,* is supposed to prove that there is no such thing as moral responsibility, because all human volitions and acts are caused; and therefore that praise and blame are useless and ridiculous. Man, we are told, is a part of nature, and as such falls under the universal sway of the law of causation. He cannot think, feel, or act otherwise than as his inherent constitution, governed by his environment, inevitably predisposes him to do. Accordingly, the good man is good, the bad man bad, because he *must* be

* See, for example, Mr. Cotter Morison's *Service of Man*, chap. ix., "On the Cultivation of Human Nature." (R.P.A. Cheap Reprints Series.)

so; to laud the one and to censure the other is irrational and ineffectual.

This interpretation, however, of the doctrine of determinism, by its attempt at strenuous logicalness, overreaches itself. We are told that it is foolish to blame the murderer, because the murderer's deed was caused. So be it; but is not our blaming equally caused? If *A* may not rationally blame *B* for committing a crime, how can *C* blame *A* for blaming *B*? In condemning praise and blame a man condemns himself. In other words, he illustrates the inevitability of that very tendency which he reprobates. He who declares that the moral standard is unjust, affirms justice as the moral standard. Those who advance this plea, however, interpret the law of causation mechanically; a deeper reading of that law reinstates praise and blame as effective, and therefore legitimate, elements in a volitional scheme of causation.

For the true justification of morality—that is, of the whole body of acts and dispositions praised and blamed—is not sufficiently indicated by the merely logical retort which we have cast back at the over-zealous necessitarians. To understand morality aright, we must remember that it is itself a vital part of the environment of each individual. The world of human wills, human standards, approvals and disapprovals, is the more influential of the two separate and distinct environments in which we all live. But as this essential, though neglected, distinction has been insisted upon in previous publications of the Ethical Movement,* we need not further elaborate it here.

Analogous to the protest against morality made by determinist writers of the school to which we have alluded, is the belief of those who assert that the economic

* See *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, by Stanton Coit, chaps. vii. and viii. (Published by the West London Ethical Society.)

factor is the sole determinant of human character and conduct. This doctrine, as expounded, for example, by Herr Kautsky,* is based upon what is misleadingly called the materialistic interpretation of history, and upon the psychological notion that the only motive to which human nature ever does or can respond is the appeal to individual self-interest.

But in order to make the term "self-interest" cover the whole field of conduct, we have to do violence to language, by obliterating the distinction which common sense has universally made between selfish and unselfish, interested and disinterested action. It is perhaps possible to reduce to this common denominator the conduct both of Christ and Judas, of the patriot and the traitor, the thief and the philanthropist, by the introduction of a subtler calculus of self-interest. It is argued deductively that we cannot possibly do what we do not prefer to do, and inductively that whatever we do is done because we prefer to do it.

Now, whatever may be the force of such reasoning in establishing the doctrine of individualistic hedonism, it is wholly ineffectual as a foundation for economic determinism. That theory must prove not only that all conduct is self-interested in this very inclusive sense of the term, but that it is all self-interested in the sense of aiming at material satisfactions. It must show not only that every man has his price, but that every man's price can be stated in terms of cash, or of goods purchasable by cash. And the most obvious weakness of this theory is that it is disproved by the conduct of its leading advocates. Every man who, being wealthy, uses his wealth and leisure in the interests of the poor and the overworked,

* *Ethics and the Materialist Conception of History*, by Karl Kautsky. (English translation published by the Twentieth Century Press, London.)

and pleads for an order of society which would lessen his wealth and leisure, breaks down utterly the notion that material self-interest is the only possible motive to human action.

It is a still more serious delusion to suppose, as does the school of thought with which we are here dealing, that the evils and inequalities of our social organisation can only be redressed by the evolution of economic conditions. This widely prevalent idea is a deduction from the reasoning to which we have just attempted to reply. Moral appeals being futile, the only hope for social salvation is the advance of the existing *régime*, by its own momentum, to such a condition that the self-interest of the disinherited classes will be conscious enough, and their organisation powerful enough, to enable them to redistribute wealth and control the sources of wealth so as to satisfy the demands of each individual. But this consciousness of the working class, in order to become dynamic, must be a moral consciousness; in other words, it must be animated not by facts, but by a standard of what ought to be. It is curious to notice that the leading paper in this country which advocates this economic determinism, and dismisses ethical idealism as impotent, is called *Justice*. Now justice is an ideal, a vision of what is not but ought to be, a regulative principle, which it is impossible to express in terms of any kind of materialism. The instinct of those who chose this title for their journal was infinitely sounder than their theory. Only a sense of justice—only an emphasis of the moral factor—has ever produced, or will ever produce, an economic revolution in favour of a dispossessed class. And even the establishment of economic justice, as we show elsewhere,* will be insufficient of itself to realise the moral imperative which is the active energy in upward evolution.

* See below, chap. vi.

Our insistence on the supremacy of ethics brings us into conflict also with the doctrine that Art has an independent sphere and an extra-moral mission to the world. This teaching is still widespread, though fortunately less prevalent now than it was some twenty years ago, having in the meantime been severely handled by the satirists, and repudiated with emphasis by some of the most inspired literary and dramatic artists of recent years. Mr. Bernard Shaw, for example, has repeatedly denounced and ridiculed the notion that "art should not be didactic." The very existence of his voluminous prefaces constitutes a challenge to the æsthetes. He insists that the purpose of all art, derived from the ethical and political philosophy of the artist, is what gives it its value and its strength. He even (in the preface to his *Plays for Puritans*) greatly understates his own dramatic originality, in his anxiety to prove that the only novel and significant thing in his plays is their ethical and social teaching. He would burn down any cathedral or destroy any masterpiece, he tells us, rather than countenance the notion that beauty of form or colour or expression has any rights apart from the purpose which inspires it; and "for art's sake" he "would not face the trouble of writing a sentence." Mr. Israel Zangwill also, whose whole literary activity—in fiction, in poetry and in drama—is actuated by his lofty moral purpose and his nationalistic idealism, has poured destructive mockery upon the mere worshippers of beauty. In his poem called "The Æsthete's Damnation"* he pictures the man of "bland and airy phrases" cultivating art for art's sake in the infernal regions, admiring the Rembrandtesque glow and the Fra Angelico flame, and exclaiming: "Oh! what a chance to study my Dante on the spot!" Even Satan cannot endure such detachment

* *Blind Children*, by I. Zangwill, p. 74. (London: Heinemann.)

from the active business of existence; and so the worshipper of non-moral and non-volitional beauty is banished to heaven,—

> Where the souls sit round and purr
> O'er each soporific blessing;
> Where the music is amateur,
> And the art is life-depressing.

Beauty, it is plain, is a by-product of the ethical life, for without ethics there could be no social life, and none of the conditions necessary to the creation of beauty. It is quite true that so long as art is duly subordinated to morals in the hierarchy of motives, it can be pursued as an end in itself. Just as a man need not have a conscious moral end before his mind in eating his dinner, provided he takes care not to conflict with the dictates of morality, so in creating a work of art the artist need not be consciously animated by an ethical purpose. Under the supreme end—under humanity—art may be an end in itself. But to declare it separate from morality, in the sense of being superior to moral distinctions and free to violate them, is like worshipping the rainbow and exalting it above the sun. Art cannot long be non-moral in this sense without becoming actively immoral, or at least offending that instinct in us which is the common root of ethics and æsthetics. Both art and morals exist for life's sake, and are valuable only as they serve life.

A degeneracy similar to that of non-moral æstheticism has undoubtedly overtaken, in many of the Christian Churches, that alliance of the arts in the service of a super-ethical religion which constitutes ecclesiastical ritual. The revolt against ceremonialism within the Church was primarily due not to dislike of art as such, but to a resentment of the over-emphasis of mere sensuous enjoyment. Elsewhere in these pages* it is shown that

* See, especially, chap. viii.

even the essential and characteristic doctrines of the orthodox Churches are objectionable because they divert human attention and interest away from the sphere of the moral will and the theatre of its actualisation. The same objection holds against Christian ritualism. In many cases, the art employed in it is so elaborate as to master the whole attention of the worshippers. But in all cases, the things signified by the symbolism are alien to what ought to be the supreme interest of humanity—namely, the realisation in this world of the ideal of a perfect society. Ritual is undoubtedly a natural and inevitable vehicle of the human consciousness, and it is as unwise—as futile, even—to think of extruding it from religion as from any other of the many spheres of life in which it plays its part.* But the only justifiable function of religious ritual is to make real and powerful and commanding the claims of duty in this life. Whenever the artistic element in it becomes predominant, its purpose is defeated; only so much artistic excellence should be introduced into it as to prevent it from offending the æsthetic sense. Whenever ritual is made the means of stimulating the craving for transcendental satisfactions, or the desire for communion with intelligent agencies outside humanity, or the desire for beauty alone, it becomes pernicious.

The supremacy of ethics is by our Principle declared to hold in social and political as well as personal relations. In thus extending its scope we are in harmony with the trend of modern science and of the modern spirit, by which the essential interdependence of mankind is realised more vividly than it has ever before been in human history. Morality has hitherto, with disastrous results, been looked upon as mainly a personal and private affair. Even now,

* See chapter on "The Psychology of Ritual" in *National Idealism and a State Church*, by Stanton Coit. (London: Williams & Norgate, 1907.)

commerce and industry are commonly treated as exempt from the more searching dictates of the moral law, and men of affairs sometimes even explicitly defend this state of things, although more generally the neglect of morality in commerce is looked upon as an indefensible but inevitable anomaly. It is inevitable, however, only when commerce is divorced from the conscious service of humanity, and pursued merely for the financial and social advantage of its devotees. Our business, as propagandists of ethical religion, is to declare that the communal welfare must be the dominant purpose of all commercial enterprise, and that that communal end is violated whenever the moral standard is lowered or ignored for the gain of individuals. The maxim "Business is business" must not mean that anything is fair or just in business which would not be permitted by an impartial tribunal fully acquainted with all the facts.

In politics, the need for a higher moral level is becoming daily more generally admitted. The whole meaning of the outcry against party politics, and of the desire that certain dominant public interests should be lifted above the party sphere, is that men are beginning to feel the absolute necessity of eliminating from national life the sinister interests of groups and classes which conflict with the general good, and the spirit which masks self-seeking under the cloak of concern for the common weal. Intellectual honesty is as necessary, and the lack of it as prevalent and disastrous, in politics as in religion. The corruption of our electoral methods, by its baneful consequences, is itself vindicating the ethical claim that morality is no idol of fanatics, but an indispensable condition of satisfactory human existence.

International relations were historically the latest sphere of life to come, even nominally, under the sway of moral principles. Only at the close of the eighteenth century

did the golden tongue of Edmund Burke proclaim the need for casting out the Macchiavellian policy of duplicity from the dealings between statesmen of rival nations. But the principles advocated by Burke have as yet won only a small measure of practical acceptance. Pride of race, lust of domination, confidence in brute force and readiness to appeal to it—these are still, to a terrible extent, the real animating motives that govern international intercourse. Nowhere is there greater need for the emphasising of ethical principles. Fortunately, although the Christian Churches have been regrettably indifferent to their duty in this direction, the development of modern life, with its multiplication of means of travel, has dissipated much of the mutual ignorance which formerly created and sustained the prejudices of each nation against all others. With widening knowledge comes clearer insight, so that we are rapidly approaching the stage when warfare will be regarded as morally on a par with private vendettas and duels. This degree of moral enlightenment it is the bounden duty of all religious bodies to inculcate in their members, and to endeavour to promote throughout society. Our Ethical Societies have in this matter an honourable record. We hail with joy the treaty between England and America, which is being negotiated while these pages are passing through the press, for arbitration on all possible matters of dispute. Our own Movement originated in America, and our English societies are in a special way indebted to the great Republic both for the impulse which led to their formation and for the teaching, and the teachers, they have thence obtained.

CHAPTER III

THE TRUE MOTIVES AND MEANS OF RIGHT CONDUCT

Conduct is actuated by interested as well as disinterested motives: the moral teacher must appeal to both, but supremely to disinterested ones.—Only these produce a reliable character.—Motives more important than actual conduct.—Legitimacy of self-regarding motives.—Weakness of the old religious motives to right conduct.—Manifold evidence of the essentially social nature of man.—The claim of supernaturalism, and its refutation.—Difference between "love of goodness" and "love of one's fellows."—The latter as a duty.—The finest character most easily perceives the essential humanity of the ignoble.—The reality of the ideal.—The help men have received from Christ and the saints.—This help independent of the objective existence of its supposed sources.—How prayer unlocks latent psychic energies in the suppliant.—The need for organising and symbolising conceptions which can thus help men.—Superfluousness of ascribing a supernatural character to such conceptions.—The ideal is our own true self.—Analogy between moral and material progress.—The danger of self-righteousness, and its antidote.—Social co-operation indispensable for moral progress.—The justification of faith in Man.

"The love of goodness and the love of one's fellows are the true motives for right conduct; and self-reliance and co-operation are the true sources of help."

—*Second Principle of the Union of Ethical Societies.*

How are men to be persuaded to act rightly? To what human instincts is the parent to appeal, or the teacher, or the preacher, or the social reformer seeking to create a movement on behalf of his ideas? This is one of the

greatest practical problems of religion, of education, and even of statecraft.

The answer must surely be: That every instinct in human nature can be and ought to be appealed to in its place. But human nature is a hierarchy of desires and purposes, which should bear a definite relation to each other. In this hierarchy the disinterested motives may be reinforced by the rest, but it is imperative that in all cases where there is a clash they should come first.

Nothing could be more superficial than the opinion that motives do not much matter so long as desirable conduct can be secured. Why label certain motives as in a special sense "true"? If selfish considerations will serve to induce men to act so that the good of their fellows in society is helped, or at least not hindered, why imply that these motives are *not* true? But it is only a very academic view which could lead anyone to suppose that good conduct is to be ensured for any length of time under varying circumstances by relying on purely self-interested motives.

We need only to look into our own experience and habits of thought in order to see that in making moral judgments we are all, as a rule, less interested in the conduct of men than in the motives it reveals. This tendency is not without the profoundest of reasons. What we are seeking to judge is not so much *conduct* as *character*, because universal human experience goes to show that self-interest, if a primary motive, is not to be trusted. Let a man do right mainly because he fears discovery, and the moment censure or punishment is unlikely his conduct becomes incalculable. Let a man do right only for the reason that he wishes to escape everlasting damnation, and we know that his "conscience" will be a tortuous one, and his righteousness of the literal, bargaining kind attributed to the Scribes and Pharisees.

If a man is a good husband, father, friend, neighbour, citizen, judge, or governor, merely because he wants our praise and fears our blame, we can trust him only so far as our eye can follow him, and not a step beyond. We even cease to call his conduct " right "; it may be correct, conventional, even irreproachable; but we feel a sacredness about the word " right " which is besmirched when it it attached to the conduct of such a man.

When, however, this has been seen, we must then further acknowledge that the self-regarding instincts are fully entitled to be motives within such limits as do not disturb the proper balance and integrity of character, or conflict with the common good. That a man, for instance, should be persuaded to give up excessive drinking because he is ashamed of this habit, and is eager to live a temperate and truly manly life, may be far more socially valuable than that he should do it solely to promote his own physical health, wealth, and prosperity, or because he is afraid of incapacity in old age. He is, in fact, not morally reformed, unless self-respect and respect for others have come to be his chief inducements. But that self-regarding hope and fear should be refused as reinforcements, or even as initial means of influencing him, would be to do violence to human nature and to common sense. The care for one's own prosperity is perfectly legitimate, so long as it is not sought to be gained at the expense of others; and both the State and the teacher of right living ought to promulgate and encourage a rounded ideal of existence, full of the natural rewards of honest exertion, and the natural pleasures of domestic and social life. Fear also, as one of the most fundamental and salutary instincts, is a proper motive—fear of the moral consequences of indolence, of excess, or of egoistic disregard for the rights and feelings of others. Nature is frequently seen to be, however unpurposive, on the side of

morality; natural sanctions, as well as the sanction of public praise and blame, ought continually to be invoked, and cannot be discarded except from sheer quixotism, or an unreasonable jealousy on behalf of motives more essentially moral in their kind.

Supernaturalistic churches have been accustomed to hold out promises or threats of future pleasure or pain as a means of impelling to right conduct. If there is a tendency to-day to cast contempt on such appeals to self-interest, it is justified only because a powerful revolt had become necessary, at once against the use of unverifiable doctrines as motives, and also against self-regarding appeals being put in the very forefront of religious teaching. The future heaven and hell have been preached with outrageous exaggeration and insistence, while tyranny and exploitation have been allowed here and now to rob industry of its just rewards, and wickedness under a multitude of euphemistic descriptions has been permitted to go unpunished. The churches at the same time have preached a despairing doctrine as to the possibilities of human character. The modern recognition of the worth of man's nature, and of the redemptive possibilities of human society, has contributed to produce an unreasoning resentment of any reference to self-interest being associated with the moral appeal. Men *can* resist temptation, stand for truth, sacrifice themselves to serve others; therefore, it is assumed, the sole appeal to all, at all times, should be in a heroic strain! The main appeal, certainly; but not the sole appeal. The great constructive task of the day is to organise heaven and hell on earth, branding iniquity and thrusting it out, making virtue and prosperity as nearly as possible synonymous terms. Successful propaganda on behalf of individual and national righteousness must be full-blooded, proclaiming a richer life, and appealing to every natural desire, but putting inspiring

demands for human service in the foreground, since without this nothing else can be won, nor, without continued willingness to live in such a way as to make the good of each the good of all, can the conditions of a better state of society be preserved as they are gained.

That human nature is essentially social, and that teaching, example, and social pressure can arouse unselfishness in human hearts, and make it habitual, is increasingly apparent. The history of human evolution is a history of ever-growing willingness on the part of the individual so to act as to serve the general welfare. An analysis of the life of any civilised State to-day will show that, notwithstanding an industrial system based on individual competition, and producing grievous injustice and well-nigh intolerable hardship, there is an extraordinary amount of disinterested conduct, both within and without the religious communions, and in all classes of society. The multitude of charities involving personal service, the mutual helpfulness of the poor, the co-operative movement, the movements for specific social reforms, the general demand for a greater measure of justice in social relations, the growing abhorrence of all forms of cruelty, and the ever-increasing considerateness and "give-and-take" of daily life, all provide evidence that the finer instincts in human character are capable of immense development in a right environment. Such an environment could stimulate them tenfold as compared with that into which most persons are born to-day. Precisely as men have turned from visions of a heaven to be realised elsewhere, and concerned themselves with promoting mundane happiness, relieving misery, and organising the opportunity of a healthy and rounded existence for all, they have come to realise from actual experience that the love of goodness and the love of one's fellows are worthy to be the paramount motives in their lives.

It is customary for the upholders of a supernaturalistic view of morality to reply to these increasingly obvious considerations by pleading that any fund of moral goodness to be found in human society has grown to be what it is under the stimulating influence of supernaturalistic creeds, and that if these are withdrawn it must disappear. To which it may be replied, first, that the old teaching that the moral law is unintelligible except as expressing the will of a transcendent power is no longer held by theologians, Protestant or Catholic, who have had a sufficient training in philosophy to be competent witnesses on the point. The moral imperative is now clearly seen to be of independent validity, so that even if the world had been won for righteousness, so far as it has been won, mainly from a desire to obey the arbitrary commands of the Creator, it would not at all follow that humanity would cease to be moral simply because it came to realise that morality was beautiful and compelling in itself, and was the fundamental means of achieving the highest welfare. The truth is that the churches have served the cause of righteousness precisely in the measure in which, however unintentionally, they have turned men's reverent attention to moral goodness, and disciplined them in living up to ideals on account of their intrinsic worth and social consequences. It is a question whether supernaturalism has even been a crutch, in anything approaching the degree in which it is now sometimes despairingly credited with performing this office. To at least the same degree it has served to obscure the meaning of morality and its beneficent purpose in human life.

Let us now consider what is meant by the distinction implied in the use of the two separate phrases, " the love of goodness " and " the love of one's fellows." To love one's fellows in general may seem no hard matter. But when we descend to detail, we discover that to care for

the wicked or the uninteresting is often difficult. Whether we succeed in learning to care for all depends on the measure in which we have been won to care for that potentiality of human goodness in which all, even the least human, partake. Then when we recognise all the circumstances of heredity, education, association, temptation, which may have gone to the making of an undesirable character, our mind at once tends to set aside and to "forgive" the results of these, and to fasten rather on the very faintest signs of common humanity and of the possibility of better things. The uninteresting, it is true, are even less easy for us than the sinner; but this means simply that we have narrowed our preferences, and not trained ourselves to judge the mass of our fellows by anything but clumsy generalisations. To the mind which is alert to perceive every shade of distinction in character, and to probe sympathetically for hidden interests and qualities, there cease to be any really uninteresting persons in the world. Let a man once be aroused to an enthusiasm not for one or two restricted types, but for humanity in general, and at once his mind begins to acquire this alertness, until surrounding persons become so many centres of interest and provocatives to the spirit of service.

Strange as it may seem, it is the man who has been won to enthusiastic admiration for a rounded ideal of human perfection who most easily detects the sparks of true humanity in all with whom he comes in contact. This ideal has not necessarily been realised in his experience—he may have met with it in history or fiction and not in life: it may be a composite, built out of his experience of many and various more or less unselfish types of character. In any case, since it results from the idealism in himself being touched and stimulated by the expression of similar idealism in others, it is in the end created out of his own experience. It is at once his own

higher self and that of humanity, for the higher selves of others approximate to his own.

This ideal of character and conduct, and the realisation of it, constitute a main part of what we mean when we speak of that moral goodness the love of which is one of the true motives of right conduct. For moral goodness is not something vague and shadowy. It may consist of qualities, but they are qualities which neither exist nor can be conceived as existing apart from actual *conduct* or the disposition to actual conduct. To speak of moral goodness is only an appropriate way of speaking of sentient beings feeling, thinking, and willing in a certain manner, either actually in the present or past of the world, or conceived as possible; or else of institutions which are at once the product of good purposes and themselves in turn new determinants of goodness of character. For the ideal is social as well as personal, and demands a just and beneficent organisation of social life.

The Principle we are considering further reads: "and self-reliance and co-operation are the true sources of help." It is commonly taught by religious bodies that if men turn to God, Christ, the Virgin Mary, or certain canonised saints, they can receive from them an influx of moral energy whereby their own can be better established and kept alive. It would be wholly idle to deny that men in turning to seemingly supernatural beings do experience an accession of strength. But science refuses to admit that such a result comes from any causes not capable of explanation in harmony with the known facts of our life, as beings in touch with one another and with the garnered experience of humanity. There is no reason to believe that beings such as men turn to for help have an existence otherwise than as conceptions, or that, even if they do exist otherwise, the increase of moral power is in any way due to their existence and interference with the ordinary

operations of the human mind. The conceptions themselves, which are as various as the religious sects which make a cult of them—as various perhaps as the individuals who form them—are not external to the human mind, but are centres in consciousness, and, as such, capable of profoundly influencing conduct. It depends on the degree of vividness with which they are developed, and the measure in which they are related to a man's purposes in life. The moral energies in his being are unlocked by the reception and adoption of certain ideas. To deny that this is an admissible and sufficient explanation is to deny some of the most patent facts of life. Other ideas notoriously unlock other energies—ideas, often, with no more relation to actual objective fact. What, for instance, will not the dream of not-yet-existent wealth do in making a man work to create and possess it? What will sex-love not do to vitalise a man's or woman's whole nature, even though the character with which the object of devotion is credited, and which is the thing that is really worshipped, is only a product of the imagination? Prayer *is* answered; but the answer does not come from outside the circle of human wills and intelligences. The fervent aspiration for moral strength creates the strength. The public appeal for moral and even material benefits predisposes all who sincerely partake in the discipline to partake also in the response. Science knows, and humanity needs, no other answer to prayer.

Conceptions which can unfasten latent energies must acquire vividness before they can perform this service, and various external agencies help to produce this vividness. In the case of morality, urgent teaching, the atmosphere and express efforts of a religious fellowship, the influence of friends, great events, bereavement, salvation from pain or death—all these tend to give vividness to religious conceptions of the most diverse kinds, so that they operate in

such a way as to set free emotions hitherto but half aroused, bringing them to the forefront of consciousness, and making them determinants of the will. Human society is full of such agencies. Nature herself, all unwitting, often provides a needed stimulus to moral growth.

Most important is it, however, that we should recognise the fact that supernatural conceptions are not necessary, even as illusions, to create moral strength. We have seen that reverence for the moral ideal should be the supreme motive for right conduct. But this ideal, turned to and brooded upon with reverent solicitude, is itself a source of inspiration no less potent than any supposed supernatural embodiment of it. Men do actually to-day commune with their inner vision of perfection. Their ideal becomes projected, not as a character in the skies or vaguely permeating the cosmos, but rather in vivid recognition of the worth of human good as realisable in their relations with the family, the city, the State, the world. As they commune with this ideal, created out of their experience both in the present and in the sublime examples of the past, with the added warmth and insight of their own personality, it acquires ever new power as an inspiration to the will.

As we have also seen, in turning to the noblest conception of character and of life obtainable by us at a given moment, we are turning to our true self. This is the first way in which self-reliance becomes a source of moral help. But there is a more obvious and equally important meaning in our use of the word. The developed moral nature demands of itself a measure of valiancy. It must be self-respecting, and not seek aid which it can do without. If the true worth of a moral act consists in its being willed as right, or primarily for unselfish ends, then the more freely the will acts, independent of supports and

reinforcements from any external will, the more truly moral it is. Furthermore, it is with morality as it has been with material affairs: the history of human progress has been a history of discarding supernatural means of obtaining material benefits, so that to-day few men will pray for rain, or expect God, in the absence of the doctor, to cure a fever. Incantations have given place to science, and experience has taught men to rely on Man. Experiment, invention, and organisation now do what man once expected of God as the result of prayer and praise. Results once attributed to the special operations of a Creator are now recognised as the unsuspected consequences of our own acts. Similarly, and with a new and invigorating self-respect, numbers have come to feel that to be constantly calling on a supernatural being to enable them to do their duty is ignoble, untrue to their innate possibilities, and even a positive source of weakness. The meaning and worth of morality is so much more apparent that it is also more compelling, and men are more ashamed when they do wrong, and more willing again and again to try to do what is right.

There is, of course, in this falling back on a man's own self a danger of falling into mere self-righteousness. But the antidote to this is not far to seek. If a man does not, and should not, beg from some occult source the actual power to will what is right, he nevertheless ought to grow, and does grow, in inward strength through moral co-operation with his fellows. Moral fellowship is an essential means, and the most potent means,* towards individual moral perfection. Goodness begets goodness.

But equally important is the fact that the commands of conscience are towards achieving both personal goodness and social goodness, and to promote the latter we cannot

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* See chapter x.

stir hand or foot except as we can persuade others to move with us. Social good depends upon social co-operation.

How does mankind become morally better? Not by prayer, except as prayer may happen to be a check on self-conceit, and a method of concentration on ideals of character and social life until these become vivid, and impel to action. Not by the interference of supernatural agents, whom the recognition of uniformity in the processes of life has banished daily further into the realm of speculation and doubt. Progress takes place through co-operation amongst the wills of men working to perfect social institutions, and to turn all the resources of nature into the service of human ideals. There has been no great upwelling of the spirit of goodness in the human heart that cannot be clearly traced to social antecedents. There has been no such upwelling, the beneficent effects of which have been permanent, except as it expressed itself not only in new individual striving after a better life but also in improved social conditions, or in the better organisation of some social group, if not of the whole nation, so that Man could better help individual men in their moral efforts. The family, occupations, forms of government, legal codes, literature, schools, churches—in so far as these last have concentrated attention on right living—these, and the vivifying teaching and example of those who "have gone about doing good," have been the great means of moral and social advancement. They have all involved the co-operation of human wills to gain beneficent human ends. Surely the study of his own history must teach Man more and more to have faith in himself, and *men* to overleap the barriers of theological sectarianism and to co-operate ever more closely in the further discerning and realising of the ideal of Righteousness implicit in social evolution.

CHAPTER IV

THE EVOLUTION OF MORALITY

The Ethical attitude to established morality one of provisional acceptance.—Our evolutionary position distinguishes us from other Churches.—The moral law the expression of man's own real will.—Meaning of "evolution of morality."—Ethical conduct defined.—Moral codes always and everywhere identical in their goal.—Distinction between means and end in conduct.—In what moral evolution has consisted.—Two characteristics of morality which are inexplicable except on the evolutionary hypothesis.—This hypothesis justifies our protest against both the moral absolutist and the moral nihilist.—Ethics not yet a science, but nevertheless valuable.—Changes of moral practice, how explained.—Morality not an external code, but a hierarchy of ends.—Agreement and difference between ethical religion and traditional religion.—Disparagements of morality if regarded as a product of evolution: Mr. Arthur Balfour's view.—Wherein the dignity of the moral law really consists.—Man the measure of all things, and all values necessarily determined by their serviceableness to his will.—Absurd consequence of Mr. Balfour's theory.—Spencer on absolute and relative ethics: the true canon of perfection in conduct.—The one absolute quality demanded in ethics is fitness to the special circumstance.—Probable future course of moral evolution.

"Knowledge of the right has been evolving through the experience of the human race. Therefore the moral obligations generally accepted by the most civilised communities should be taken as the starting-point in the advocacy of a progressive ideal of personal and social righteousness."

—*Third Principle of the Union of Ethical Societies.*

THE Union of Ethical Societies is not composed of moral anarchists. We do not reject everything established and

try experiments to find whether drunkenness is better than sobriety, truthfulness than lying, stealing than honesty. We do not hold that the experience of humanity in the long millenniums of its evolving life has produced nothing of value in the sphere of morals, any more than we hold that it has produced nothing worthy in the spheres of art and science. We believe that there is already a great accumulation of that which is known to be morally good, and needs no further proof. The very basis of our organisation—the enthusiastic acceptance of the Good Life, as possessing an unconditional claim upon us, a claim resting on no external authority, but on the inherent constitution of man's rational and social nature—presupposes at least sufficient agreement as to the concrete meaning of the Good Life to make that term valid and significant. The supremacy of morality does not mean to us the supremacy of an empty name or a frigid abstraction; it denotes the absolute worth of a way of life already in large part known, and growing ever more valuable and more authoritative with the experience of each day and of every generation.

Our acceptance of those lines of conduct which the moral judgment of the world has approved is absolute in every department, except where we have a clear conviction, based on verified knowledge, that the world's judgment is self-contradictory or warped by defective insight. We are evolutionists in morals, because we are convinced that evolution is the universal way of the world's progress. But we do not hesitate to ascribe the highest reverence to the moral law in so far as we know it, either because of its lowly origin or because a later age will know it more fully and interpret it differently as regards some concrete prescriptions. We outdo the Christian churches in our insistence upon the importance of good character and right conduct, because we assert more explicitly than

they the unconditional nature of the claim of human duty. We dismiss as irrelevant all thought of reward and punishment in an after-life, and we ignore the question as to the existence of a superhuman Creator, not because that question is uninteresting in itself, but because we are convinced that no Creator's fiat could add one jot or tittle to the force of the moral imperative. A Creator could not enhance its glory; his own would be derived from it.

The Principle before us is one that distinguishes the Union of Ethical Societies from all other existing religious fellowships. No other church, as such, has yet recognised the verified fact that righteousness is earthborn—an outcome of the human will to live in its striving after self-fulfilment. In so far as other religious bodies have given attention to this fact, it has taken the form either of denial or of a grudging and reluctant admission of it. We, on the contrary, hail it with joy, as a vindication of our belief in the essential goodness of man's nature; for what could more convincingly prove man's goodness than the fact that the very standard by which he measures good and evil, and sits in judgment upon himself, is the expression of his own fundamental constitution, his deepest will, his ultimate purpose?

By the evolution of morality we mean that there has been a development, caused by experience and by conscious human effort, both in the perception of the purpose which morality serves in our life, and in the adaptation of means to this end: in the knowledge, that is, of what specific lines of conduct really do make for the goal at which morality aims.

In all ethical conduct, we hold, three elements are traceable by the moralist, although they may not have reached the stage of explicit self-consciousness in the agent. These are (1) the moral *will*, which moves the agent to aim at the well-being of other individuals or of

the community as a whole; (2) the *end* sought, which, although it may be limited, is consistent with and deducible from a universal standard of right; and (3) the specific *means* by which this end is sought to be attained.

We contend that race-preservation and self-preservation are the two ends at which all moral commandments and all moral codes which the world has ever approved can be shown to have aimed. And of these two, the former is the supreme and dominant one, to which all—including even the life of individuals—must be subordinated and, at need, sacrificed. Always and everywhere, to this extent, the moral judgment of humanity has been entirely self-consistent. No divergence as to the means of attaining these ends can blind us to the omnipresence of the ends themselves. Nor is there the slightest mystery in the fact that "to righteousness belongs happiness," when we remember that "righteousness" is simply the generic name for all those courses of conduct which have been discovered by experience to lead inevitably to the well-being of existing or coming generations of men.*

But the purest moral will, and the most self-abnegating acceptance of the good of the race as the end to be pursued, cannot save us from the possibility of erring in the selection of means to our end. A physician may recognise perfect health as his standard, and may disinterestedly do his uttermost to bring his patient to that condition; but if he were mistakenly to believe, let us say, that the only means of curing consumption was to administer arsenic, he would quickly produce an effect the precise opposite of that which he intended. And if the governing power in a nation, or its religious leaders, inculcate courses of personal or social action which do

* This problem is more fully treated in *National Idealism and the Book of Common Prayer,* by Stanton Coit, pp. 233-239. (Williams and Norgate, 1908.)

not in fact lead to permanent well-being and happiness, no sincerity of aim on their part will avert the mischievous consequences of their error.

Now the evolution of morality through the experience of the human race has consisted (1) in a gradual widening and clarification of the ideal of goodness, (2) in an ever-increasing knowledge of the means of attaining it, and (3) in a consequent deepening of the conscious purpose of pursuing it—"the will to seek the good." The moral goal aimed at in primitive society was the preservation and well-being of some very limited social unit. Through the play of a great complex of forces which we need not pause to trace here,* this unit expanded progressively into the tribe, the nation, and finally humanity at large. In our own day we see it extending beyond the humanity that happens at any moment to be living, and embracing within its scope the unborn generations of men to the end of time. And this goal is now pursued by a myriad means of which primitive man had no conception. In early societies, the means chosen were often fantastic, crude, inadequate, and not infrequently self-defeating. Moral evolution, then, on this side, has consisted in the substitution of real for imaginary, and more efficient for less efficient, means of attaining the selfsame end.

If, then, the present morality of mankind has been reached by such a process of adaptation, we shall expect to find in it two characteristics, both quite natural from our evolutionary point of view, but both inexplicable from a standpoint which regards any existing code as eternally binding, or as the subject of a definitive revelation from some superhuman source of wisdom. We shall expect to find that any long-established and widely-accepted ethical

* For a clear and well-informed study of moral evolution, see Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics*, Pt. I., "The Beginnings and Growth of Morality." (New York: Holt, 1909.)

practice does possess a certain value, as a means of adapting society to its environment, or as aiding it in its struggle for existence by contributing to its coherence and functional efficiency. As in the case of the protective devices by which animal species are maintained, we shall anticipate, at all events, a certain "survival-value" in the moral codes of humanity and in the conduct they sanction. But at the same time we shall not necessarily expect to find finality in any positive prescription of moral authority or in any of the social practices stamped as virtuous. We shall be surprised if any single device hit upon by the human mind in the past embodies so much insight and so universal an experience as to be for ever placed beyond the possibility of revision and improvement.

This twofold principle enables us, as evolutionary moralists, to meet two opposing schools of critics. It supplies us with an answer both to the moral conservative who declares tradition sacrosanct and repels ethical innovation as blasphemy, and to the anarchic innovator, who, rejecting *in toto* the authority of the established order, undertakes to destroy the temple of the world's morality and in three days to erect a new and better one.

It may be easy to show that morals is thus far largely an unscientific body of tradition. We do not pretend to possess as yet a perfected science of ethics; we have perhaps little more than the unclassified data, the raw material of a future science. Many thinkers, observing the inconsistency, the contradictoriness, the crudely empirical character of the morality of common sense,* rush hastily to the conclusion that morals can never be a science, that

* A vivid impression of the hazy and haphazard character of current morality cannot fail to strike the student of Professor Sidgwick's subtle and microscopic analysis of "The Morality of Common Sense" in *The Methods of Ethics*.

it changes and must change radically from age to age and from place to place. Against this nihilism, the voice of supernatural religion urges with less and less acceptance the transcendent origin and coercive authority of a patently obsolescent and defective code.

We ethicists, being evolutionists, are at once unterrified by the indictment of the nihilist and unconvinced by the extravagant claim of the absolutist. We fully admit the contradictoriness of much current moral practice, and yet we affirm its enormous value to the world. Because we cannot accurately delimit the areas of the respective virtues, for example, we are nevertheless not sceptical as to the fact that they are virtues. The importance of the uncharted frontiers of justice and charity implies and testifies to the importance of those empirical duties themselves. If we do not know the exact point at which truth-speaking ceases to be a virtue and becomes a vice, we know with certainty that the rule of truth-speaking ought to be followed in the vast majority of cases, and that trained insight and moral tact is the best guide in the rare exceptions. We know that no revision of concrete morality can ever disestablish the commandment against false witness; that, on the contrary, the injunction can only be made more searching, more inclusive, and more binding. Temperance, again, may degenerate into asceticism; but no sane man will therefore accept a gospel of self-assertion which should encourage him so to eat and drink that to-morrow he should die.

Our evolutionary principle, moreover, solves for us the difficulty arising from the perpetual changes in the practices which have been morally approved. The plain man is bewildered at finding that in one age it is counted right to drink to an extent which the next age denounces as pernicious; that the sixteenth century affirmed the morality of a system of coercion in religious belief which the

nineteenth rejected as barbarous. The evolutionary explanation, however, is clear: under both practices, personal well-being and social stability were the ends aimed at, and the shifting of society's approval is due to a clearer perception of the means of reaching them. So with slavery: there was a time when it was substituted for the indiscriminate murder of captives, and when, consequently, slavery represented a moral advance. For those to whom it was the best course practicable, it was undeniably right. It became wrong, however, the moment men had evolved to the point where they saw more deeply into the demands of justice and mercy. Or in regard to marriage: since its purpose is to secure the highest permanent well-being of humanity, that system which on the whole and in the long run has best attained this end—namely, monogamy—is accepted by the ethical religionist as his starting-point. But in the same spirit which led men to establish monogamy, he will demand modifications wherever and whenever strict adherence to the rule defeats the purpose it is meant to serve. For example, the known transmissibility of imbecility and other deadly defects should, we contend, lead to the denial of the privilege of parentage in the case of those tainted with them. The effectual prevention of parentage in such cases would be an instance of that adaptation of moral practice to the exigencies revealed by experience, in which moral evolution always consists.

What, then, it may be asked, is morality? Absolutism cannot answer the question; nihilism avoids the difficulty by throwing morality overboard altogether, as being no more than the variable expression of the interests of a dominant caste or priesthood. The evolutionary view, distinguishing clearly between means and ends, shows how the same deep purpose has been pursued through all the varying codes of different ages and races. The savage

tribe performing its cruel sacrifices, and Christ delivering a Sermon on the Mount, are both doing things intended to serve the highest good of the community in general.

What, then, is morality? Not the means employed—not a code of rules, not an external system imposed by authority—but the will within the code, the animating purpose in conduct. Morality is a *hierarchy of ends*, the means to which may change to any extent with the growth of experience and the deepening of insight, while the ends remain for ever identical. The perpetuation of a race mighty in mind, sound in body, and pure in heart; the subjugation of sub-human nature to the docile service of that race; the abolition of pain and hatred, vice and feebleness, sorrow and sighing—this is the universal moral goal. The essence of fully conscious morality is the will which accepts that goal and sacrifices all for it.

Men have hitherto generally expected this ideal to be realised by superhuman power, through superhuman means, in a world beyond "our bourne of Time and Place." The one vital difference between the religions of the past and our ethical faith is that we look for its achievement here on earth in human time, by natural means, through the secular co-operation of devoted men and women. The old faiths erred fatally as to the means of realising their aim, but they were essentially true in their tracing of the lineaments of the great ideal. We, as ethical evolutionists, declare that the world's accumulated tradition of moral experience is a priceless heritage, which we must both employ in the service of our own time and enrich for future generations by incorporating with it our own day's new discovery of the Way of Life. To reject all that the race has learned would be foolish because unscientific, and blasphemously disloyal to the humanity whose agelong striving alone has made our own existence possible. To deify it as complete and final truth would

be equally false, both to the spirit of the past and to that ever-growing vision which depends for its realisation on the ever-renewed efforts of a force whose trustees and depositaries we are—the surging, onward impulse of the world, the ancient life that is always new.

The fact that morality began at a low stage and has grown with the growth of man, is sometimes regarded by the defenders of belief in a personal Creator as destructive of its value and dignity. The best-known statement of this theory is that made by Mr. Arthur Balfour in the first chapter of his *Foundations of Belief*, which we may take as typical, since it undoubtedly voices the judgment of thousands. Mr. Balfour's work does not attempt to disprove the truth of the evolutionary theory, or of the body of belief, described by him as Naturalism, which centres in and radiates from that theory. His argument only undertakes to show that on the naturalistic hypothesis there can be no validity either in ethics or æsthetics. Moral ideals, according to this view, need to be justified by the dignity of their source in order to inspire us with reverence; and that teaching which finds the source of morality in natural selection is bound to place morality on a level with any other mental proclivity or bodily appetite of man which originated in the same way.

"It is hard to see, on the naturalistic hypothesis," says Mr. Balfour, "whence any one of these various natural agents is to derive a dignity or a consideration not shared by all the others—why morality should be put above appetite, or reason above pleasure."* And a few pages later he delivers himself of an oft-quoted opinion which

* *Foundations of Belief*, eighth edition, p. 17.

seems to strike severely indeed at our evolutionary view of morals:—

> Kant, as we all know, compared the moral law to the starry heavens, and found them both sublime. It would, on the naturalistic hypothesis, be more appropriate to compare it to the protective blotches on the beetle's back, and to find them both ingenious. But how, on this view, is the "beauty of holiness" to retain its lustre in the minds of those who know so much of its pedigree?*

This question, which to many people seems unanswerable, does not even constitute a difficulty for a clear-sighted lover of humanity. Our ethical view is that the indefeasible sublimity of the moral law is not derived from our conception of the origin of the law, and cannot fade with a change in that conception. It arises wholly from the fact that morality is the indispensable condition of man's best life. Since righteousness is the way of life and the only way to better and fuller life, it inevitably possesses a dignity and sanctity proportionate to our sense of man's worth and to our love for man.

We need not even blench from accepting, for the purpose of defending our Principle, Mr. Balfour's somewhat offensive analogy between the moral law and the beetle's blotches. We need only insist that, in all logic and in common fairness, the one shall be judged from the standpoint of human values, and the other from the point of view of a speculative and philosophical beetle. Inasmuch as the latter's blotches serve no human need, it is inherently impossible that they should excite in man any such exalted emotion as is aroused by that moral law which is the very core of man's being, the cohesive element of his rational nature. But if a beetle, endowed with self-consciousness and discourse of reason, should come to perceive the function served by his blotches in

* *Ibid.*, p. 20.

coleopteral life, then—provided the race-will of his species was as strong in him as is that of humanity in normal men and women, and provided the blotches were as indispensable to the best life of the beetle tribe as is morality to the human—he would have the same overpowering sense of their sublimity as the good man has in the case of the moral law.

Those whose view Mr. Balfour voices, overlook the essential fact that man is inevitably the measure of all things, the creator and conferrer of all values. Man's estimates, therefore, of the relative worth of things must be proportionate to their capacity to serve the fundamental promptings of his will. And since the race-preserving instinct is even deeper in us than the self-preserving, morality, which is the supreme instrument of the race-will, possesses an imperious and unchallengeable authority. The most inveterate sinner finds it difficult to extinguish the flame of self-condemnation which is enkindled by a conscious violation of its dictates; and this for the excellent reason that breaches of morality are not merely sins against external commandments; they are also offences against the essential selfhood, the real will, of the sinner himself. Hence our reverence for the moral law is immediate, intuitive, underived; and when our regard for that law is ascribed to our regard for the superhuman being from whom it is supposed to emanate, the natural order of things is precisely inverted.

We grant—nay, we assert—that morality originated through the natural selection of spontaneous variations in the direction of the will to race-service. Instead, however, of our sense of its dignity being lowered by the discovery of its origin, the exact contrary, for every ethically-religious soul, is true: our feeling towards the origin is transmuted into one of grateful reverence. It is the moral law which transfigures its source, not the

source which transfigures the law. The noonday sun needs no apologist to commend its life-enhancing splendour: no theory can brighten its beams or detract one jot from their radiance. How much less shall we seek to add, by our poor cringing theologies, to the native majesty of that inner luminary by whose light alone we discern even "the choir of heaven and furniture of the earth"!

One need not even be a "Naturalist" in order to be perfectly aware of this. Immanuel Kant, that great prophet of our ethical religion, taught clearly that no God can be revered by man except because, and in so far as, he embodies the universal ethical law and actualises the universal ethical ideal. We resent, as something like a blasphemy, the withering scorn sometimes professed for morality when conceived as merely a means for humanity's preservation and development. It is that very end and function which explains the ineffable holiness and majesty of the moral law in the eyes of all who love their fellows as Jesus Christ loved them. A theologian of Mr. Balfour's way of thinking, according at least to his logic, would have no more regard even for Jesus Christ than for a beetle, if for any reason he gave up his theistic theory. The character of Christ, for such a one, is not self-justifying. Unless it can be shown to have proceeded from a superhuman source, he will accord it the same place in his consideration as he gives to any protective trick of natural selection. Surely such an instance of its results reduces the theory to absurdity.

But it is not only against the defenders of orthodox theology that we have to assert the imperative dignity of an evolving morality. So distinguished an evolutionist as Mr. Herbert Spencer, by a singular process of reasoning, arrives at a doctrine of ethics which would depreciate its worth and deeply discourage our devotion to practical goodness if we were compelled to accept the conclusions

he proffers. In the first volume of his *Principles of Ethics* we find it stated that, "Instead of admitting that there is in every case a right and a wrong, it may be contended that in multitudinous cases no right, properly so-called, can be alleged, but only a least wrong."*

Mr. Spencer distinguishes between absolute ethics and relative ethics. The former treats of what a perfect man ought to do in a perfect society; the latter, of what an imperfect man ought to do in an imperfect state of society. Now, there can be no doubt that the epithet "absolute" ascribes a dignity, whereas the term "relative" is depreciatory. One cannot resist the feeling that what a perfect man ought to do in a perfect society, if it alone deserves to be called absolute, is somehow right in a sense which cannot be attributed to what an imperfect man ought to do in an imperfect society. Yet a deeper moral insight surely reveals to us that for an imperfect man to do what he ought in an imperfect society is supremely and absolutely right. It is the one thing to be done by that individual on that occasion in that social environment. If this does not give it the mark of absolute rightness, what could? It is the one thing which that person on that occasion in that circumstance can do which will most rapidly establish a perfect society of perfect beings.

This being the case, it is very natural that singular consequences should follow the acceptance of Mr. Spencer's doctrine. Since, according to that doctrine, scarcely any human conduct can be absolutely right, none can be absolutely wrong. Again, on his showing, not even an infinite deity could do perfectly good acts to finite beings; for perfection in the agent is not sufficient to ensure perfection in the conduct: there needs to be a perfect *community* before the latter can be attained.

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* *Principles of Ethics*, vol. i., chap. xv., p. 260.

Furthermore, the conduct of a perfect man in a perfect State—even if we could imagine it—would be of no use whatever as a guide to our own action. Absolutely right deeds, we must assert, are possible under the worst circumstances; for the only absolute quality demanded by ethics is that the conduct shall, in the unique situation to which it is adjusted, be such as will best advance the universal reign of righteousness. The giving of a cup of cold water in the name of human kindness to a fellow-creature in torment is the ideally and perfectly right thing in circumstances that prevent anything more effectual being done. When Mr. Kipling pictures Gunga Din in hell,

> Sittin' on the coals
> Givin' drink to poor damned souls,

he pictures the divinest quality of human character expressing itself in the unsurpassable perfection of ethical action. Let us then be reassured as to the utter and ultimate value of human righteousness in the defective circumstances of an evolving society. The best we can see and do is always the perfectly right thing for conduct; the impossible is never a duty; the absolutely fitting is the absolutely right.

Our Principle affirms not only that existing morality has evolved, but that there is a possibility of continuous advance towards a more perfect morality. The conditions of such an advance must be the deepening of moral insight, the discovery of more effective means of realising the ideals implicit in current standards, and the attainment of a higher level of intellectual honesty, especially in regard to religious belief. The individual will cease to find his motive in personal advantage, and will be actuated by the desire to serve humanity; and all those improvements in society will ensue which are set forth in the

sixth chapter of this book. The family will cease to be a despotism, for the wife will be rendered economically free, so that her dependence upon the husband will be neither greater nor less than the husband's dependence upon her. Education will learn to find its true method in a scrupulous reverence for the unique individuality of each child, instead of classing all together and submitting them to the same mechanical drill. The spread of social justice, involving as it will the abolition of destitution, the provision of sufficient education, leisure, opportunities of travel and æsthetic culture for everybody to develop the highest efficiency for social service, will shatter our class divisions by the truly humane process of levelling up, and universalising what is now the standard only of the most privileged portion of the community. The removal of special class-temptations, by the elimination of the opportunity of acquiring wealth without rendering social service, will make it easy for higher moral standards to be incorporated in legislation. The same ethical judgment which will destroy class barriers within nations will lead to the eradication of race hatred and of the unjustifiable notion of the inherent superiority of any one race to any other. It will also make impossible—as it is already visibly doing—the submission of international differences to the arbitrament of the sword. Thus will Humanity fulfil itself in many ways, and finally achieve the world-embracing ideal implicit in its earliest strivings towards the right.

CHAPTER V

THE FINAL AUTHORITY IN RELIGION

This problem radical in mental evolution.—False conception of the issue : real dispute is not freedom *versus* authority, but, Where does authority truly reside?—Protestantism and Catholicism both presupposed a supernatural revelation, commanding implicit obedience. If this were true, the problem would be much simpler than it is.—This doctrine being rejected, the Catholic and Protestant positions both become untenable : henceforth every individual's judgment must turn to every possible authority for guidance, but no authority can be absolute : the individual always responsible.—Two defects of our age : (1) self-assertion of the ignorant, (2) tendency to mistake opinions derived from authority for opinions reached independently.—Lack of intellectual modesty and sincerity : Tyrrell cited.—Duty of suspending judgment on unsolved problems : Huxley.—Conditions precedent to action on controverted questions : effect of general education in training the judgment even in specialised departments.—Duty of attaining a conscientious and reasoned judgment on political matters.—Moral anarchy and levity now prevalent, due to disintegration of old authority and rudimentary condition of new.—Authority indispensably necessary.—Unconsciousness of moral problems due not to their non-existence, but to ethical ignorance : danger of this state of things.—Concrete evil results of ethical ignorance.—Changes needed to rationalise moral action : (*a*) ethics must be de-supernaturalised ; (*b*) Church authority must be either universalised or replaced : authority must be competent and specialised.—These canons already accepted in all other departments than that of religion. Beware of the expert outside his province.—The new religious authority thus far rudimentary.—Its sphere will ever be advisory

only, not mandatory.—The right of rebellion.—The moral innovator must be welcomed.—Where authority opposes conscience, conscience, if fully enlightened, must be followed.—Our Principle resolves the discord between freedom and authority, accepting authority only as the handmaid of freedom.—A new casuistry needed.

"For each individual, after due consideration of the convictions of others, the final authority for any opinion or action must be his own conscientious and reasoned judgment."
—*Fourth Principle of the Union of Ethical Societies.*

THE accurate demarcation of the respective spheres of authority and individual judgment in regard to all questions of belief and conduct has been the radical difficulty in mental evolution. The world has oscillated between autocracy and anarchy—between a conception of authority which crushed the individual soul, and a doctrine of private judgment which enthroned each single mind, however crude, untrained, or incompetent, as arbiter of the deepest problems of life and destiny.

The historic circumstances under which this conflict broke out afresh on the birth of Protestantism gave rise to the superficial notion, still widely prevalent, that freedom and authority are antithetical terms—that the acceptance of authority is synonymous with the renunciation of liberty, and the claim to liberty with the rejection of authority. But whoever will examine the course of controversy between Catholics and Protestants in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, will speedily recognise that the question at issue was not whether authority was to be accepted or rejected *in toto*, but, What is the final seat of authority in religion? The Catholics, who asserted the exclusive claim of the Church's tradition, and denied the right of the individual to anything but passive acceptance of it, were as unphilosophical as the Protestants, who made every man his own authority, whatever his ignorance of history or lack of specialised equipment. But, whatever

the merits or demerits of the contestants, the struggle lay between two rival centres of authority. Witness the amazingly clever sword-play of Chillingworth* and his opponent. Chillingworth is able easily to show that the authority of the Church cannot be accepted without a long and complicated exercise of individual judgment, and his opponent demonstrates with equal ease that the acceptance of any given canon of Scripture involves the recognition of the authority of that Church which settled the canon.

On both sides of this once fiercely disputed controversy, however, a presupposition was accepted which is impossible for any adequately instructed and honest thinker in the twentieth century. That presupposition was that, in regard to religion at least, if not to the whole range of human knowledge and conduct, absolute and final truth had been revealed to the world, and was accessible to the individual mind. Either in the Church or in the Bible, or partly in each, supernatural power had deposited a treasure of transcendental knowledge and wisdom, which rendered the human reason superfluous and impertinent in every department which that wisdom illuminated. Man's business was not to judge of the content of this revelation; he had only to ascertain the authenticity of the documents or the hierarchy through which it was mediated. Once assured that he was in possession of the revealed truth, he had but to bow the head and obey.

The problem was a simple one. If there were a Church with such authority as the Roman hierarchy claimed, the individual might willingly enough surrender the right, and so escape the irksome task, of finding for himself an orientation amid the perplexing voices of the world. Or if there were, as the Protestants asserted, an infallible

* *The Religion of Protestants a Safe Way to Salvation* (1637; many subsequent editions).

Scripture, and something like a supernatural guarantee of inerrancy to all who studied it in the right spirit, there need be no further discussion as to the seat of authority.

This conception, however, of an absolute power of prescription, derived from a transcendent source, and either vested in a society or miraculously preserved in writings, must now be frankly and finally relegated to the limbo of mythology. And, with its rejection, the attitude of the Roman Catholic to tradition and the individualistic private judgment which the Protestant brought to bear upon the Bible, become equally impossible. If private judgment receives no supernatural illumination and is confessedly fallible, it must reverently avail itself of all the help that combined human experience through the ages can bring to it, and every individual must obviously trust to authority for the decision of a thousand problems that he is personally incompetent to solve. Yet if no authority is absolute and infallible, no authority can claim more than a relative and conditional acceptance. In following it, the individual can neither surrender nor escape from his own responsibility. Authority can be only an aid to, never a substitute for, his own power of insight and judgment.

The special defect of our age is not excessive or credulous deference to recognised authority, but the anarchic self-assertion of individuals in departments where they have no right to express any dogmatic opinion. We suffer especially, too, from a widespread lack of discrimination, which leads men to confuse the opinions and beliefs they have derived from others, through education, reading and tradition, with those which have come through their own independent thought. Multitudes are unconsciously indebted to some form of authority for a great many doctrines and practices which they imagine themselves to have reached unaided. The result is that they wholly fail to understand their own relation to the general mind

of humanity, and do not realise their infinite indebtedness to the community, to which they owe not only their bodily but their mental nurture, and even their power of reacting critically upon their experience and arriving at new truth.

Another subtle disease of many minds is the irresponsibility with which important beliefs are professed by persons who have never given any serious attention to their basis. The intellectual modesty which should lead a man to ask constantly, "What right have I to this or that opinion? What do I know of its history, its claim to validity?" is sadly lacking. We are still suffering from the consequences of an agelong religious tradition which made a virtue of credulity and a vice of dispassionate inquiry. With all the love of truth so loudly professed in many quarters, we are still far from realising the importance of a searching intellectual integrity. We have not assimilated that principle which, according to Father Tyrrell, distinguishes religious Modernism from religious Mediævalism:—

> A principle . . . moral rather than intellectual: a question less of truth than of truthfulness, inward and outward—of a rigorous honesty with oneself that makes a man ask continually: Is this what I really do think, or only what I think that I think? or think that I ought to think? or think that others think?—that teaches him intellectual modesty and humility and detachment; that restrains his impatient appetite for the comfort and self-complacency of a certitude (natural or supernatural) which entitles him to be contemptuous, arrogant and dogmatic towards those who differ from him.*

It is easy to see how great a revolution would follow upon the general acceptance of the ethical principle which Father Tyrrell so eloquently proclaims. Nothing less than

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* *Mediævalism: A Reply to Cardinal Mercier*, p. 179. (Longmans, 1908.)

the death of sectarianism, the extinction of all claims to authority which could not justify themselves to expert inquiry, and a re-birth of mental modesty throughout society, would result from it.

The finest product of a wide and balanced culture is the ability to suspend judgment between rival dogmatisms or competing codes of conduct regarding matters of minor importance, and to recognise that where doctors disagree it is not always necessary for the layman to decide. There is a wise agnosticism, which can recognise that many problems are unsolved even though it will not venture to pronounce them insoluble. A man is not bound, for example, to have any dogmatic conviction at all as to whether there is a life after death or not; whether there is a material world independent of perception or not; whether there is a superhuman personal deity, or whether any alleged founder of a religion was a historical or a mythical character. A fine example of this high stage of culture was the late Professor Huxley, who would not cast in his lot either with the assertors of materialism or with the dogmatic idealists. If he had to choose between these rival systems, he tells us, he would give his vote against materialism; but he did not feel called upon to declare himself as of either school.*

But, while there are many questions where suspension of judgment is the proper attitude for the intelligent layman, there are other problems equally controverted, involving matters on which the layman has to act; and here his power of estimating probabilities must be brought into play. It is well to remember that a general training in literature and history, especially if it be supplemented (as every individual's education ought to be supplemented) by a course of psychology and philosophy, gives even the

* Essay on "Science and Morals," reprinted in sixpenny edition of *Essays Ethical and Political*. (Macmillans, 1903.)

layman a great power to judge the reasoning of experts in departments in which he himself has no special equipment. One may be, for example, an amateur in biology, and yet be fully competent to form a general judgment of the validity of the Darwinian hypothesis. Without possessing a specialist's knowledge of Christian origins, one may be fairly entitled to a definite opinion as to the authorship of the fourth Gospel and the Pauline Epistles, the historicity of Jesus, or of any particular incident in his biographies. What is needed in such cases is that one should have studied the works of leading scholars on both sides of the matter at issue, and brought to bear on their contentions a judgment disciplined by considerable exercise on analogous literary, historical or scientific problems. Or if, again, the case be not one of speculation but one involving action, the same principles apply. General experience and insight will qualify one who has no special knowledge of law or medicine to decide which advocate or which physician he can trust, and how far he will act upon the advice of the one selected.

In regard to political and social policies, the Principle of the Union of Ethical Societies which we are here expounding possesses a special value. Generally speaking, while the concrete provisions of particular legislative measures sometimes require specialised training to enable one to pronounce upon their merits, yet the broad lines of any party's policy are within the competence of any fairly educated man or woman. In no department of life is it more easy or more necessary to arrive at that "conscientious and reasoned judgment" which, according to our Principle, should be each person's final authority for any opinion or action. Yet in no department is more levity displayed in arriving at positions which are no mere private opinions, but fraught with vital consequences to the whole community. If I am to help, as an elector, in

deciding whether my country shall pursue a pacific or a militarist policy, shall develop its democratic tendency so as to enfranchise all men and women, or tend rather to confine the right of representation to property instead of conferring it upon persons, I am morally bound to take serious thought before casting my vote. A study of historical development, of general ethical principles, of economic and social conditions, should precede my action. If I give my vote without such study, because I personally admire one political leader or personally dislike another, or because my set dictates it as a matter of good form to vote for a particular party, I am as much a traitor to society, and it may be to posterity, as if I deliberately voted against my conscience to secure a bribe. No one has any right to take the smallest share in directing the policy of his country upon any less ground than a clear conviction that he is assisting her evolution in the direction of securing the greatest common welfare. The prevalent substitution of catchwords for convictions, of the furtherance of by-ends for the good of the State, of loyalty to persons for loyalty to principles, is as great a danger to national stability and honour as it is to intellectual honesty and ethical patriotism.

Another sign of the disintegration of authority from which the present age suffers is the levity with which moral principles and institutions which have stood the test of centuries are questioned and rejected by persons wholly without the knowledge and experience which alone could justify any expression of opinion with regard to them. The doctrine of self-assertion is pushed to the most extravagant lengths. Men who would not venture to trust their own unaided judgment on any detail of physics or chemistry are yet ready to preach revolution against the ancient sanctities of humanity, even when the whole weight of expert opinion is opposed to their

innovations. The most quixotic utterances of Nietzsche are accepted as oracles, and the notion of good and evil as a fundamental distinction in human actions and dispositions is dismissed as obsolete by people who have never read a treatise on ethics or given an hour's consideration to its problems. "Never resist temptation: prove all things, and hold fast that which is good," is an actual specimen of the reprehensible flippancy with which writers of this school challenge the young, the inexperienced and the headstrong to scorn the accumulated wisdom of the world and make their personal caprice, instead of the experience of ages, the arbiter of their conduct. No censure could be too grave for such heedless imperilling of the very conditions of social health and stability.

Authority, then, we must follow in the vast majority of cases, if only for the obvious reason—stressed by Mr. Balfour* with haughty scorn for the average mind—that no man can be a specialist in everything, although each man is confronted, in practical as in mental and moral life, with multifarious problems which only expert guidance can decide.

It is true, of course, that many of us get through life without becoming conscious of any dilemmas in conduct. We accept naïvely the rough-and-ready rules of what Professor Sidgwick called "the morality of common sense," guide ourselves in varying cases by inconsistent principles, without becoming aware that they are inconsistent, and are never shaken out of our crude sense of self-sufficiency. This condition of affairs, however, is far from being such a blessing as it might seem. The fact that we see no difficulties is no more a proof of their non-existence than the invisibility of the stars to a man in a fog is a proof that the heavens are empty. Many

* Chapter on "Authority and Reason," in *The Foundations of Belief*.

people are woefully beclouded in regard to the moral principles on which they habitually act. They could give no valid reply to a sceptical inquirer who should ask why they respect other people's lives and property, why they are abstemious rather than intemperate in eating and drinking, or why they are truthful instead of mendacious. Confronted with such queries, the average uninstructed person would lamely answer that these are virtues prescribed by duty, or by conscience, or by supernatural revelation. Duty and conscience, however, as such a person conceives them, far from being ultimate, irreducible principles, could be dialectically shattered in five minutes by any glib Nietzschean; and supernatural revelation, both as a fact and as a moral sanction, has already been annihilated by the deadly weapons of science and critical philosophy.

And, apart from this growing danger, the results of our obliviousness to moral difficulties are both patent and disastrous. Hundreds of hopeless failures in the training of children, for example, are clearly traceable, not to lack of good will on the part of parents, but to sheer lack of the necessary knowledge and insight. Parents frequently evoke in their children a deep repugnance to right courses of conduct, simply because they are able to recommend them only by seemingly arbitrary and dogmatic commands instead of by reasoned explanations that would irresistibly appeal to the interests of the child. How frequently a liberated youth rushes headlong into dissipation, simply because the seeming temperance and virtue of his early years was due to coercion instead of insight and conviction! How many a young woman's tragic fall is demonstrably due to the absence of that quasi-experience, that grounding in good coupled with knowledge of evil, which could so easily have been imparted by parents possessed of adequate knowledge of the social bases and sanctions of right! Our morality must become a matter

of conscious, vital principle, instead of an apathetic conformity to a dictated code, if it is to make us efficient as parents and citizens.

To raise us to this level, something more is needed than a change in the method of teaching morality. The unnatural and pernicious association of ethics with supernaturalistic theology must be ended, and the authority assumed by provincial Churches, such as the Roman, Greek, or Anglican, must either be so universalised by a scientific and historical reconstruction that it will cease to be inharmonious with the modern mind and conscience, or else it must be resigned to a new organisation, equipped with the ample knowledge and the broad humanistic spirit of psychology and sociology. Our Ethical Movement utterly rejects the claim of any existing Church to implicit obedience, in the sphere of faith or of morals. And if this rejection be deemed presumptuous, we venture to reply that in history, independent minorities have frequently been nearer to universal truth than coerced and drilled majorities. No authority can be valid in more than one department, and that authority is self-condemned which claims to sway and regulate the whole of life. The Church which passed sentence upon Galileo, thereby passed a yet graver sentence upon itself. It proved that it had an utterly false conception of the scope of authority and of the qualifications which justify it. Those qualifications must be no less than universal endorsement by competent judges, verification of all principles and presuppositions, and the demonstrated competence of every person in whom the authority is for the time being vested. Its scope must be rigidly limited to the sphere which these qualifications cover.

If it seem that the standard here set up is an impossible one, we reply that the canons suggested are those imposed already in every department but that of religion. In no

science is the specialist's dictum regarded as coercive beyond the closely defined limit within which he satisfies them. It is true that many men expert in one department still presume to speak as though with authority outside their legitimate spheres; but there is an increasing recognition that such action is wholly unwarrantable—a growing sense that we must beware of the expert outside of his own domain. That very concentration of attention for many years in one department which makes a man a specialist, involving as it does a relative neglect of all others, renders him less rather than more competent than the average instructed layman to judge of outside matters. Hence the really cultivated mind learns to shrink from uttering opinions on controverted questions that lie beyond the range of its specialised equipment; and the public is learning to have a contempt for the dicta of specialists on such questions, proportionate to the reverence it feels for their pronouncements on matters within their own sphere. One's respect for the teaching of a great and original physicist on the constitution of matter, for instance, is the very measure and justification of one's disrespect for his oracular utterances upon mental and moral problems.

The authority which shall be entitled to claim, in the sphere of conduct, such acceptance as the Roman Church has demanded in every sphere, is to-day not fully organised. Its credentials are as yet imperfect. Ethics is thus far not a science, nor have we yet such a systematisation of ethics, psychology and sociology as will go to make up the equipment of the Church and the individual spiritual advisers of the future. Even when we have, however, the sphere of the moral specialist will still be rigidly limited to the supplying of enlightenment and counsel. As a lawyer merely describes possible alternative courses to his client, and neither can nor does relieve him from the responsibility for final decision and action, so no spiritual doctor

can ever again indulge in the quackery of vending ready-made panaceas. He will but illuminate the judgment which must finally act on its own responsibility. Hence there must remain to the individual an indefeasible right to stand against the world, provided he does not venture to rebel save on single points where he is fully and rationally convinced that he is the seer of a new truth. The pioneer in law, religion, or morals, who speaks with fullness of knowledge, and with that evidence of disinterestedness which is furnished by readiness to incur censure or punishment, must for many a day yet be patiently heard. We may ultimately reach a stage where law and custom shall be so fully in accord with the demands of a thoroughly scientific ethics that further innovation will be as inconceivable as rejection of the axioms of Euclid seems to-day.

Meantime, however, the admitted absence of any such authority in morals and religion as we possess in the physical sciences, is the sufficient justification of the innovator in those spheres. But always, unless there is to be stagnation, the world will have to be ready to hear the pioneer patiently, unless or until it is convinced that he is hopelessly wrong. Whenever the conflict between authority and individual liberty reaches the phase where the individual—disinterestedly pursuing super-personal ends, fully knowing the case for all that he opposes, and fully convinced that his opposition is just—is prepared to sacrifice even his life for his cause, we must confess that it is his duty to follow conscience, even if it dictates a breach of positive law. For that is the supreme and ultimate loyalty; conscience is the God above all gods.

Our Principle, then, while it enthrones authority, does so only in the interests of freedom. The sacredness of individuality and personal responsibility is such that the whole of the world's knowledge and wisdom must be

enlisted in its service. This is only possible through such a co-ordination of moral and religious truth, incarnated and made accessible in specific persons, as we have already attained in the analogous sphere of medical science. Just as we are not left helplessly to our own crude devices when our bodies are ill, so, when life's higher and subtler problems press upon us, we ought to be able to turn for guidance to expert doctors of the soul. And just as consulting a physician involves no surrender of our liberty, but is only a means to that health which is the indispensable condition of free life, so to consult a spiritual doctor need be no submission to coercion and tyranny, but an enlargement both of freedom and of the powers whose exercise makes freedom a blessing.

A new casuistry is needed, based on our wider moral vision and our sense of the social source and function of the moral law—a casuistry, however, which, being scientific and disinterested, will escape the danger of degenerating, as did that of the Jesuits, into a systematic condonation of the very sins it is intended to prevent. But we must remember that in the sphere of the moral life every new case is unique, because it involves either fresh factors or a fresh combination of factors; no problem can be settled by a mere citing of precedents. Therefore a wise authority will never be tempted to exchange the office of counsellor for that of commander. Responsibility will to the end remain individual; but it will then be guided not by private opinions, but by principles of universal truth.

Thus the perfection of authority will coincide with the final abandonment of coercion and dictation, and with the full fruition of that spiritual liberty of which our Protestant forefathers were pioneers. Liberty and authority, harmoniously yoked, will together fit us and guide us for

the pursuit of ideals beyond the utmost bounds of our present vision. They will lead all men to glad self-sacrifice in the cause of Man, whose service is perfect freedom.

CHAPTER VI

RELIGION AND THE SOCIAL ORDER

Our attitude towards social problems determined by the fundamental principles of ethical religion.—Theory that religion should be divorced from politics: Dr. Forsyth quoted.—But can religion hold aloof from judging social conditions?—Religion essentially the assertion of personal and social ideals; its task is the spiritual unification of nations.—Interaction of moral and physical conditions.—Materialistic conception of history criticised: Hooker cited.—Illustrations of bad social conditions, and their effect on moral life.—Low prices of labour, etc.—Abolition of such conditions essentially a task of religion.—Advantage which evil forces have over good in the human world, and consequent necessity for efficient organisation of the good.—Distinction between the work of the Church and the work of the politician.—Concrete demands of the social conscience.—Religion has hitherto failed because it affirmed only general principles.—We need a religion of the whole man, not a culture of only one side of human nature.—Social character of early Christianity: Seeley cited.—Growth of social consciousness in the Churches: the Pan-Anglican Conference, 1908; the Presbyterian Churches of Scotland.—Human nature can be modified by social institutions.—The religious function of the State.

"The true well-being of society requires such economic and other conditions as afford the largest scope for the moral development of all its members."

—*Fifth Principle of the Union of Ethical Societies.*

ETHICAL Societies emphasise nothing more strongly than the doctrine of personal responsibility for social betterment; and, as a result of their teachings, a very large proportion of their members and sympathisers endeavour

to express their religious spirit by participating in practical forms of social service. The Ethical Movement, as such, is not interested in the fortunes of any particular party; nor does it stand committed to any particular school of social philosophy. Its chief duty is to arouse in individuals the sense of social responsibility and to affirm an ideal standard of both private and public morality.

Ethical religion refers exclusively to the life of man upon the earth, and to his conduct and happiness as a progressive human being; and its philosophy covers his social as well as his spiritual nature. The corporate life of man, the conditions under which he lives, his education, the food that he eats and how he earns it, the amount of his leisure and how he uses it, are questions so inseparably connected with his moral or spiritual life that no religion which is based upon human experience can treat them as unrelated. Ethical religion, therefore, does not attempt to deal exclusively with either "the economic man" or "the spiritual man," but with the whole man. The problem presented to the ancient philosopher was the creation of the perfect State, and that problem—which is also our own—constitutes as vital a part of religious enterprise as the affirmation of creed or doctrine. There is a social soul as well as an individual soul, and ethical religion is concerned with the salvation of both. To the ancient Roman, the word "religion" implied fidelity rather than worship, and it bound a man honestly to serve the State of which he was a member. The Latins used the word "religion," the Greeks the word "politics," to express the same idea of social justice and righteousness; and if, as Mazzini declared, the end of politics is to apply the moral law to the civil organisation of a community, the purpose of moral enthusiasm may well be directed to the task of endowing political energy with something of its own comprehensive insight and reforming will.

Ethical Societies, as this volume shows, are committed to the principles that right conduct ought not to be dependent upon supernatural sanctions or upon belief in a life after death; that the love of goodness and the love of one's fellows are the true motives of right conduct; and that self-reliance and co-operation are the true sources of help and well-being. For such organisations, the amelioration of this life in all its phases must, therefore, be the alpha and omega of religion. If, as we affirm, man is essentially social in nature, it must follow that the task of perfecting the individual can be achieved only in and through the perfecting of human society, while society itself can advance towards perfection only by making in its own structure such fundamental changes as will increase the moral efficiency of each of its members.

Many men of great earnestness of purpose insist that it is no part of the duty of religion or of the Church to meddle with any question of social reform which, in the end, may involve political bias and therefore division among its members. They claim that the function of religion is limited to providing the principles, the men, and through them the kind of public, from which social betterment will naturally spring. "It is not a programme," they affirm, "but a spirit, a moral habit, that the Church has above all to bring to pass. It has to bring the faith and the rule of Christ. Its first object is not the social state but the social soul, meaning by that the godly soul, with its social love and its serviceable feeling. For the Church to identify itself wholly with a social programme which is the order of the day is contrary to its genius and commission."*

This declaration by a representative Christian preacher goes to the root of the whole question that we are here

* Rev. Dr. Forsyth, *Socialism, the Church and the Poor.*

considering. Is the Church of the future to continue the attitude of spiritual isolation from questions affecting social relationships which has characterised the historic Churches, or shall it become inspired with a wider and profounder message? Can an organised religious body, without abandoning its mission or losing its identity, accept responsibility for the social disorders that exist around us and that hinder moral advancement? Or must its task be restricted to the influencing of such individuals as it may chance to attract, in the hope that they will, as a result of its teaching, themselves do something towards putting a crooked world straight?

This, at least, may be affirmed without further hesitation: If the Church of the future confines itself to the arid spiritual individualism which this restricted view of its function implies, it will fail to recover the ground lost by existing Churches, and the forces that are making for social righteousness will be deprived of the driving power and the moral inspiration and sanction which it is the particular business of religion to supply.

Directly the word "religion" is subjected to examination, it is seen to imply very much more than that personal piety and uprightness of individual character to which it has, since the Reformation at least, been confined. The task of converting a nation to a passion for perfection in all its parts, the bringing of a whole people to a state of repentance for the social diseases that disfigure their common life, is not degrading religion by making it menial, but elevating it and applying it to its noblest and most rightful purposes. What higher mission could any cause desire than that it should be called upon to provide the nation with a compelling conception of its own existence as a vivid social personality, animated by a finer moral sense and a vaster civic pride than now obtains? Such an ideal involves very much more than just the sum total of

the good-will of its individual citizens; it is the conversion of the "social soul" to a divine sense of its own unity, dignity and power.

Ethical religion accepts this spiritual unification and enlightenment of the nation as its task. It therefore demands such economic and other changes in the structure of the State as will facilitate the moral growth of all its members. While rejecting the theory that the moral life, at least on its inward and spiritual side, is impossible in an unfavourable social environment, and wholly repudiating the fallacy that a mere sufficiency of this world's goods is a guarantee of right living, it nevertheless insists that the economic barriers which at present obviously hinder moral betterment, in so far as they can be proved to be removable, should be removed.

There is, we repeat, no adequate justification for assuming that the defects of human character would be abolished as a result of mere economic reconstruction. If we could remove all the anti-social interests and all the ignorance that delay social reform, and at the same time ensure a system of society in which no man lived upon the labour of another, and in which entirely wise institutions prevailed, there would still be vast need for individual improvement. The materialistic doctrine of history, with its implications of a machine-made perfection, finds little support either in the records of human experience, or from an analysis of the inherent defects of human nature. To say that men and women would be perfect provided that they lived in a perfect social environment, is but a begging of the question, since the most influential part of any individual's environment consists of the souls of his neighbours, the perfection of which is, therefore, a condition of the perfection of the environment.

That many existing social conditions positively thwart moral growth is, however, admitted on all sides. Common

daily experience teaches us that high moral standards can scarcely be achieved by vast sections of the poorer classes owing to the actual circumstances of their lives. Some few do, indeed, escape from the contamination of their surroundings and rise to commanding heights of moral distinction; but just as one swallow does not make a summer, so the existence of one moral genius does not disprove the demoralising influence of slum life, with its daily incidence of overcrowding, rackrenting, and adulterated food. For hundreds of thousands of our fellow-countrymen, the moral question is predominantly a food question, a housing question, a question of sufficient leisure, pure air and healthy social intercourse. For the half-starved peasant, the sweated seamstress, the overworked and underpaid potman or general labourer, the higher life is almost impossible. The great Anglican philosopher Richard Hooker expressed this truth three centuries ago with his customary clearness of vision and majesty of phrase: "Inasmuch as righteous life presupposeth life; inasmuch as to live virtuously is impossible except we live; therefore the first impediment, which naturally we endeavour to remove, is penury and want of things without which we cannot live."*

The truth of these propositions being incontestable, it follows that the evils of low wages and sweating must directly affect the moral life of vast sections of the community. The sums that are paid as wages in low-grade industries are so incredibly small that the victims of these conditions are often driven to crime and vice in order to supply the "want of things without which they cannot live."

It is impossible by the mere recital of prevailing conditions to realise the unspeakable anguish and horror that

* *Ecclesiastical Polity*, I., 2.

they involve for our more unfortunate brothers and sisters; yet without some attempt at illustration we cannot even conceive of the conditions of the tens of thousands who, from no fault of their own, are already "in hell being tormented." We cite, almost at random, the following instances:—

"Button and hook-and-eye carding is done at home by some who apply for relief. It is the last resort of those who come down and who delay applying for relief until they are in the deepest destitution. They get starvation wages. About sixpence per day is the most that they get. A woman would have to work very hard to earn 3s. 6d. per week if confined to her own labour. . . . The wages paid for home-work in wholesale tailoring and corset-making of the cheaper class, which is the chief part of the Bristol trade, are so exceedingly low that no amount of industry could provide an adequate support for a single woman."*

The Report of the Home Work Committee, issued as a Blue Book in 1907, gives many evidences of a white slavery of the most terrible description. As an example of the constant semi-starvation to which workers in the sweated industries are subjected, the common rates of pay in certain classes of work may be taken. Thus, boys' knickers, for making throughout, bring a reward of 2d. per pair; men's coats, making throughout, 4d. to 9d.; vests with five pockets, making throughout, 3½d. each; boys' cotton blouses, 1s. 1d. a dozen. One of the factory inspectors in his evidence before the Committee declared that common export shirts were paid for at a rate so low as 6d. per dozen, out of which the worker had to provide her own needles and cotton.

These figures, with all that they involve in privation, in

* Minority Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Law.

maimed and stunted lives, make one recoil as from a blow. They penetrate below the gilded trappings of our civilisation and overwhelm us with shame. What attitude should any religion that is worthy of the name adopt towards them? Should it follow the example of the thrifty yet scandalous neutrality of the historic Churches in regard to them? This course doubtless avoids internal dissension and preserves intact the income on which the Church must live, but it also involves stagnation and moral death. To succumb to the temptation would be to substitute "the quietness of death for the quietness of life; the stillness of silence for the stillness of harmony; the poverty of uniformity for the richness of organic unity."

Thousands of workers, of whom those referred to are but types, are shut out from the joys of civilisation by conditions which are known to be remediable. Between the ethical spirit and such conditions there is not and there cannot be either covenant or peace, and the religion that seeks to bring the kingdom of Man on earth as it is in the heaven of idealism must proceed by the method of social deliverance as well as by moral exhortation. It must hold before the victims of an indefensible social order the vision of a better day in which there shall be no more pain. To restrict its message to admonishing them for their sins and to threaten them with the wrath of an angry God, while remaining silent concerning the evils that have made them what they are, is to be guilty of something far worse than simple ignorance or well-meaning stupidity: it is to become both brutal and grotesque.

Our religion demands, therefore, such social changes as will bring the sources of moral betterment within the reach of every man, woman and child. At present our work, like that of every other Church, is hindered by a social environment against which moral appeal often seems

vain. The forces of evil seem to require no special organisation or protection; they possess a solidarity and a cohesive power of their own, whereas moral idealism has to win its way not only against a hostile environment, but also against man's ancestral habits and instincts. The causes devoted to the things that are of good report have to gain their ground inch by painful inch, and their equipment is poor in comparison with that which is behind the brewer and the sweater. It is not politics, however, but common humanity which asks that the hungry shall be fed before they are preached at, and that the sins of the parent shall not fall with preventable heaviness upon the child; and it is not going beyond the high function of religion to demand that an environment shall be assured which shall help rather than hinder moral development.

It is no part of the duty of a religious movement to draft specific legislative proposals for the removal of the evils against which we protest. That is the business of the politician, the economist and the statesman. But no religion can escape the responsibility of making these servants of the public realise that the cause of moral betterment is in their hands, and that little progress will be achieved until they have destroyed the barriers that impede its growth. A religious movement may, however, be expected to give some precise indication of the kind of changes that are required, and so we offer the following summary, from a Statement on Social Problems that was prepared for discussion by the Fourteenth Annual Congress of the Union of Ethical Societies:—

"Everyday experience proves that without the provision of a minimum of the physical requirements of life, the attainment of a high standard of moral, mental and physical well-being throughout the community is seriously imperilled. There is consequently urgent need of such

legislative efforts as will tend to furnish or to find work for all; to ensure a sufficient minimum wage, to establish an effective system of insurance against unemployment, accident, invalidity and old age, and to provide adequately for healthy homes, for rest, and for education. It is important that every boy and girl should be provided with suitable educational advantages as regards the general culture of the mind and instruction in personal and civic duties, as well as some opportunities of preparation for a specific pursuit in life. The curriculum of every State-supported school ought to be entirely secular, but in all schools alike the formation of character should be the supreme end of school life. The age of compulsory attendance should be raised, and colleges should be provided, wherein all prospective teachers should receive, free of charge, the most efficient training. All sex disabilities should be abolished and men and women should enjoy the same educational advantages. The sale of alcoholic liquor should be in the hands of the State, which should endeavour to reduce it to a minimum. Slum areas should be abolished, and the community should undertake the provision of working-class dwellings, in order that the poor may live in decent and healthy surroundings. Special instruction should be given to young people to enable them to realise the responsibilities of parenthood. A wise alertness to promote the fitness of the future race should be fostered, and young men and women should be educated to the idea of applying a high physical, intellectual and ethical standard in the selection of marriage partners; while certain people should be advised to abstain from parenthood altogether. The excessive burden of armaments should be reduced by referring henceforth all disputes between nations to an authoritative and inclusive International Court of Law. Further, the allocation by Governments of money for the purpose of promoting

international good-will—already begun tentatively—should be developed into a permanent international system with adequate funds."

How far such changes as are here indicated can be achieved through voluntary effort, and how far they must be secured through the authority of the State, it is beyond our immediate province to determine. We merely insist upon the imperative need for them, by whatever means they can be secured.

A religion is not concerned with politics in so far as politics represents party programmes and party interests; but it cannot escape its responsibility for the social wrong that exists. The line of least resistance for any cause that is struggling for a foothold is to leave the unpopular things to be done by other people, and to concentrate its attention upon the acceptable things that offend no one because they mean little. It would, in our judgment, be far better that a Church should die than that it should purchase popularity at such a price. How can any Church, seeing around it terrible human suffering, refrain from expressing its love and pity in the concrete acts through which alone that suffering can be removed? And how can it justify its desire to shape individual lives for that social service which it declares to be unworthy of itself? The mere affirmation of general principles is not enough. Truth is not merely a passive aspiration: it is an act, a deed, a way out. The principles of the Sermon on the Mount have been proclaimed by the Christian Churches for wellnigh twenty centuries, but what Church has applied them effectively to the problems of social life? Ethical religion conceives not of man as being made for the Church, but of the Church as being made for man,—for service in all that touches his spiritual or social needs.

The method of trying to elevate mankind by concentrating attention upon one side of human nature while

neglecting the rest, seems finally to have broken down; and we are witnessing the growth of a religion which comprehends all man's social acts and ideals. Mankind has had sufficient of a religion which operates only on Sundays, while the world is kept going by six days of constructive toil. It requires not only a religion that is applicable to business, but also a business that is fit for religion. The religion of the future will be formative as well as reformative; it will express itself in concrete acts of goodwill towards men. It will furnish a rule of life for communities as well as for individuals. It must explain man's relationship not alone to God or to Christ, but to everything that exists; and it must apply its principles to every problem that they can solve.

It is doubtful whether any religion has ever been preserved by dogma or by faith in formulas alone. Christianity, for instance, fastened itself upon the world in proportion as it influenced man's attitude towards the social relationship. The deplorable isolation from the social life of the community which at present characterises it must not be accepted as a thing settled either by precedent or by necessity. "The plan of relegating religion to the private sphere," says Sir John Seeley, "did not begin to be adopted till the Reformation had introduced two Christianities where there had been but one before."*

In insisting that henceforth religion shall become much more than a vague tendency towards righteousness, or a thing of words and rituals and buildings, we are encouraged to note that this view is being more and more accepted by the best heads and hearts in the English Churches. Twenty-five years ago the number of clergymen of the Church of England who were interested in social and industrial problems was comparatively few, and the valuable work done by such voluntary ecclesiastical

* *Natural Religion*, 4th edition (1895), p. 214.

bodies as the Christian Social Union and the lately disbanded Guild of St. Matthew has never yet been honoured by the official encouragement of the Church itself. The change that is now taking place is both rapid and vital. When the Pan-Anglican Conference of 1908 assembled, the demand for a wider outlook had become too insistent to be longer ignored, and it achieved a success that astonished even its promoters. The Committee on the Training of the Clergy, for instance, urged, for the first time, that " instruction should be imparted in social and economic questions " to all candidates for Holy Orders, while the Committee on the Moral Witness of the Church declared " that it is the duty of the Church to apply the truths and principles of Christianity, especially the fundamental truths of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, to the solution of economic difficulties, to awaken and educate the social conscience, to further its expression in legislation (while preserving its own independence of political party), and to strive above all to present Christ before men as a living Lord and King in the realm of the common life." The Conference as a whole declared that " Property is a trust held for the benefit of the whole community," and that " its right use should be insisted upon as a religious duty." It further urged " upon members of the Church practical recognition of the moral responsibility involved in their investments," a responsibility which extended to " (*a*) the character and general effect of any business or enterprise in which this money is invested; (*b*) the treatment of any person employed in that business or enterprise; (*c*) the due observance of the law relating thereto, and (*d*) the payment of just wages to those who are employed therein."

The Nonconformist Churches are also undergoing a similar change of outlook, and " the two great Presbyterian Churches of Scotland have, with the full authority

of their supreme ecclesiastical Courts, founded fourteen social institutions, and among them a Farm Colony. For these the Church, as such, makes herself directly responsible."*

The whole tendency of present-day religion is, indeed, towards a tardy recognition of responsibility for social evils, and tens of thousands of earnest-minded men and women have come to feel that for them religion means nothing at all unless it has the courage to point to the brewer, the sweater, the landlord and the capitalist, and to say, like Nathan of old, " Thou art the man."

In pleading for the removal of those social barriers that thwart or destroy moral effort, the Ethical Movement is following the lesson of all experience, which affirms that the individual who, like the savage, spends all his energy in the struggle for a bare existence, is doomed, like the savage, to a mere animal existence. On the other hand, we learn from experience that human nature has been and is being continually modified by law and social regulations. Education laws, marriage laws, criminal and temperance laws do change men's conduct for the better, and consequently tend to raise the general moral standard; and just laws affecting wages, leisure and the general social environment will carry still further the process of national improvement.

A civilisation that is based upon the principle of excessive luxury at one end of the social scale and brutalising privation at the other end, cannot endure; and the lesson provided by the ancient " cities of the plains " is not without meaning for our own time. The poor man is knocking at the door of opulence, and he declines to be turned empty away; woman demands formal recognition for herself as a citizen; the outcast pleads with the social

* *The Church and Social Betterment*, by Dr. Wilson Harper.

conscience for conditions under which he too may live and grow to the measure of the stature of the fullness of a perfect manhood. He is the direct descendant of Agur the son of Jakeh, whose petition to Jehovah was, "Feed me with food convenient for me; lest I be full and deny thee and say, Who is the Lord? Or lest I be poor and steal and take the name of my God in vain."

Ethical religion is therefore on the side of the outcast poor in their claim for conditions in which the moral life can breathe and live. It conceives of the State as possessing a religious basis, which is in itself alluring and worthy of all men's acceptance, and which is capable of being expressed in every social and economic law. Let the work of saving the individual soul from sin be carried on by all means, and in that work we will take our part; but we shall not forget that such work is, and must remain, incomplete until it is accompanied by the work of social salvation, based upon the conception of the whole community as a corporation of wills, a multiple personality, seeking to achieve perfection in all its parts.

CHAPTER VII

THE SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF MORAL GOODNESS*

Professor James on the rudimentary condition of psychology.—The science of ethics equally undeveloped.—But we possess the raw material for a science.—The scientific method defined.—A science of ethics an end in itself, but also a potent means for the development of practical morality.—Ethics and psychology interdependent.—Sphere of the laity in developing moral science.—Falsity of the distinction between facts and ideals of the ethical life.—The ideal is a fact.—It actually does animate our moral judgment: otherwise we could never become aware of it.—For this reason, we can never transcend the distinction between good and evil.—How the science of ethics will be spread until it becomes universal.—Sidgwick on the self-contradiction of conscience.—If such a self-contradiction exists, we can never have a science of ethics.—But it is not a fact.—Absence of a science should make us modest in our practical moral judgments.

"The scientific method should be applied in studying the facts of the moral life."

—*Sixth Principle of the Union of Ethical Societies.*

ONE of the most famous and voluminous writers upon psychology in our times, Professor William James, closes his *Text-Book of Psychology* with a paragraph closely pertinent to the question as to the existence, or the possibility of the existence, of a science of ethics:—

> When we talk of "psychology as a natural science" [says Professor James], we must not assume that that

* See also *De la Méthode dans les Recherches des Lois de l'Ethique*, by G. Spiller, in *Revue Philosophique*, 1905.

means a sort of psychology that stands at last on solid ground. It means just the reverse; it means a psychology particularly fragile, and into which the waters of metaphysical criticism leak at every joint—a psychology all of whose elementary assumptions and data must be reconsidered in wider connections and translated into other terms. It is, in short, a phrase of diffidence and not of arrogance, and it is indeed strange to hear people talk triumphantly of "the New Psychology," and write "Histories of Psychology," when into the real elements and forces which the word covers, not the first glimpse of clear insight exists. A string of raw facts; a little gossip and wrangle about opinions; a little classification and generalisation on the mere descriptive level; a strong prejudice that we *have* states of mind, and that our brain conditions them: but not a single law in the sense in which physics shows us laws, not a single proposition from which any consequence can causally be deduced. We don't even know the terms between which the elementary laws would obtain, if we had them. This is no science—it is only the hope of a science. The matter of a science is with us. . . . But at present psychology is in the condition of physics before Galileo and the laws of motion, of chemistry before Lavoisier and the notion that mass is preserved in all reactions. The Galileo and the Lavoisier of psychology will be famous men indeed when they come, as come they some day surely will, or past successes are no index to the future. When they do come, however, the necessities of the case will make them "metaphysical." Meanwhile the best way in which we can facilitate their advent is to understand how great is the darkness in which we grope, and never to forget that the natural-science assumptions with which we started are provisional and revisable things.

The Union of Ethical Societies incorporated as a Principle of its Constitution the statement that the scientific method should be applied in studying the facts of the moral life because, in the judgment of its members, the science of morals is in as deplorable a state of backwardness as the science of mind. Indeed, there is no science of ethics as yet. As in psychology, we have a

string of raw moral judgments, a little gossip about opinions, a little classification and generalisation on the mere descriptive level, a strong prejudice—which itself, however, in certain circles of thinkers, is beginning to weaken—that the distinctions between right and wrong and good and evil are rooted in the nature of things and are not mere figments of fancy; but not a single law, in the sense in which physics shows us laws.

But, as Professor James says of psychology, so we say of ethics: the matter of the science is with us. This fact is sufficient ground for great hope and enthusiasm among us. Moreover, the raw material we possess, although not science, is the hope of a science; and we are as confident as James in his department that the Galileo and the Lavoisier of ethics will surely come some day; else past successes are no index to the future.

Perhaps no one will question the insight and wisdom of the Ethical Movement in recognising that the only means, or at least the primary means, of transforming the raw material of a science into a science proper, is to spread abroad the idea that the scientific method should be applied to that material. The method of science is that of minute, exhaustive observation; and observation, in order to be minute and exhaustive, must be made by very many persons to whom such work is a life-task, and who are pre-eminently gifted in the power of discriminating and assimilating the facts they have to investigate. On the basis of such observation must arise generalisation and verification, made by many persons independently of each other, and also conjointly. This is the method common to all the sciences. We maintain that what is called righteousness—both inward, of the will, and outward, of the act—ought to be thus observed, and its facts made the basis of generalisation.

Our motive in urging the necessity of applying the

scientific method to the facts of the moral life is not simply intellectual and theoretical. Such an interest would indeed be motive enough, for no higher truth can be desired for its own sake than that towards which the discrimination between right and wrong points our attention. But our motive is far more than theoretical. The knowledge of the right is not only an end in itself, it is also a means towards the realisation of all the great ends of life, and towards the fulfilment of that co-ordinated kingdom of ends which constitutes our volitional rationality. Not only does the science of right exist now merely in raw material; the right itself exists merely in raw material. Just as the attainment of a true science of mind will itself be the most powerful instrument which the mind can possess in order to develop mental activity as such, so, too, a science of character and conduct is needed before we can develop character and conduct beyond the rudimentary suggestions that are now at our disposal for study and admiration.

Our quotation from Professor James concerning psychology reminds us, in passing, of the peculiar dependence of ethics upon psychology. The backwardness of moral science is in great part due to the backwardness of mental science. But it may be well to point out that the specific attempt to apply the scientific method to the facts of the moral life, and the attainment of clearer insight into the meaning of the good and the right, will undoubtedly be itself a mighty and delicate instrument in the hands of the general psychologist. Many have realised that ethics must wait upon psychology; but unhappily few psychologists have realised that their science must wait upon ethology. The truth is that the two sciences interact upon each other, and are reciprocally dependent.

A number of our Ethical Societies declare that one of

their objects is "to assist in developing the science of ethics." It has been more than once protested, however, that to build up the science of right is wholly beyond the equipment and scope of so popular an organisation as an Ethical Society. But, as we say elsewhere in this volume, such a protest is due to a lack of appreciation of the service which the organised laity can do merely by calling attention to the need of applying the scientific method to the facts of the moral life. What is more, our societies, by giving ethical lectures and by encouraging the study of ethics, provide a public for the specialists, and thus encourage and support them. And, as we also point out in another connection, the expert needs the testimony of men and women in general; and who could provide such data for classification and interpretation better than persons who are religiously organised in devotion to the love, knowledge, and practice of the right?

The word "facts" in the statement of principle with which we are here dealing, is worthy of the reader's closest attention. Our Constitution affirms that the scientific method should be applied to the *facts* of the moral life. Now, it is often maintained that ethics is distinct from psychology in that the latter is a science merely of fact, whereas the former is a science of standard, or ideal. Ethics treats of what ought to be, not of what is; it gives the principles which *should* regulate our moral judgments. Its object is to provide the canons which should underlie our approvals and disapprovals in regard to character and conduct.

This distinction is of some practical value, but it is far from being profound. Professor Mackenzie, in speaking of the various codes and rules which men have in fact accepted as good, says: "All these are ethical facts, and have an equal right to be chronicled as such, though they have not an equal right to be approved. There is a marked

difference, therefore, between the science which deals with the *facts* of the moral life and that which deals with the *rules* and *ideals* of the moral life."

Now, while that which Professor Mackenzie here says is true, nevertheless it does not go to the root of the matter. For the ideals, standards, or norms of the moral life are also themselves facts. Indeed, they constitute the one and only moral fact. The ideal or standard of right must clearly be either a real or a fictitious one. And if it be not a real standard, an objective norm, it is no norm at all—not being real. We cannot set *de facto* moral judgments over-against the standard that ought to regulate them, as if these two were not vitally related; for if the ideal that ought to animate men's actual judgments never *is* the animating principle of anybody's judgment, then it is not an ideal, simply because it is not real.*

The relation between actual moral judgments and the standard that ought to animate them is not that between fact and not-fact; it is rather the relation between a concrete instance of incomplete expression and the idea which we detect lying at the heart of that imperfect expression. When we have studied with minute and comprehensive observation the positive, concrete, specific moral judgments and codes of men and societies, we are able by generalisation and verification to detect in them an underlying, indwelling, animating ideal, standard, or norm, which may be perfectly embodied in no one of them.

Now, when we have plucked out the heart of all the seemingly conflicting moral judgments of men, we have

* When, in chap. i., we object to the word "Positivism," we do not imply that the ideal is not actual. It is an actual ideal; but it is not an *actualised* ideal. It therefore is no more "positive" than is a dream, as compared with waking experience. See below, p. 98.

attained to a fact—our supreme fact. The moral ideal is a thing which we find, not invent. We discover it; we do not create it. It is just as real as the imperfection and defect which make the various judgments of men seem to be in conflict one with another. The normative science, therefore, of the ideal involved in human life, is the science of an actual ideal, which does manifest itself on some occasions. Had it never so manifested itself, we never could hope to attain to the science of it. Indeed, does it not go without saying that every science is ultimately a science of fact?

Here we are involved in no paradox. It is no self-contradiction, not even a seeming self-contradiction, to declare that the ideal itself is a fact—is an actual potency which lurks at the heart of all the various judgments of human beings concerning rational activity. There have been writers upon ethics who have been misled by the distinction between a science of fact and a science of standard, into thinking that, after all, morality, righteousness, is in the strict sense of the word not a fit subject-matter for science at all, but only of philosophy or metaphysics. But the Ethical Movement commits itself to the scientific method, because its organisers believe that the standard which *should* animate our judgments concerning rational activity is constitutional in the will of every self-conscious rationality, and that by studying the constitution of man, as at least one instance of rational agency, we discover the moral ideal. That ideal may be glorious and radiant; but it is none the less so because it is also a fact, in the sense of an animating principle, a regulative energy, to some degree active and dominant in human life.

It is not enough, then, to concede, as Professor Mackenzie does, that thinking which is not logical is not thinking, and that action which is not right is not action;

rather is it that norms of correct thinking which are not actual necessities of conscious beings cannot really be norms of thinking at all, and that an ideal of conduct which is not organically a potency at the centre of any rational agent's being, would be a mere figment of fancy, a mere nothing; and the science of a standard of conduct of this sort would be a science of nothing. In other words, we maintain that the ideal of human life *exists*, that it is a fact, not only latent but energising, at the heart of humanity—yes, and of any other possible volitional rationality.

If our Ethical Movement is right in this contention, how worse than flippant is the notion that we can ever transcend the difference between good and evil, or right and wrong, or good and bad! How superficial, and therefore demoralising, is the popular interpretation of the phrase "the relativity of ethics," as if the standard of right and wrong had no existence except in the conventions and prejudices or circumstances of given individuals or groups of individuals! It is because we believe that the moral ideal is a fact that we are members of Ethical Societies. An "ought" which is not also an "is," an ideal which is not at the same time an ultimate, and the supreme, reality, never could draw men to sacrifice themselves in devotion to the cause of its actualisation. It is because the "ought" is an ought that *is* that it is capable at the same time of being the object of religious veneration and of scientific wonder and curiosity. It is because the "ought" is an ought that *is* that we may and do at last entertain the hope of harmonising all the antagonisms between religion and science.

The truth of the seeming paradox that the ideal is an actual, that the "ought" *is*, is not a unique and unclassifiable one. Take, for instance, the distinction between a dream and a "real" experience. We say that the real experience is actual, and the dream is not an actual fact.

Yet, when we think of the difference between a dream and the mere thought or idea of a dream, we see that a dream, when it exists, is also a fact. Dr. Havelock Ellis rightly names his scientific work on dreams *The World of Dreams;* for it is a real world—the real dream-world. So the ideal of which the Ethical Movement speaks is the actual ideal, the real "ought"; and when we speak of the ideal, we do not mean the thought of it, but the fact itself.*

We are already acquainted, then, in a common-sense way, with the moral ideal as a fact; but as yet our theoretical counterpart of it is not without self-contradiction, nor does it tally with and interpret to us all our moral experiences. We wait for the Galileo or the Lavoisier who will give us, so to speak, the astronomy or the chemistry of the moral ideal. Yet we do not wait in idleness. We wait patiently, because we are busily engaged in hastening their coming. We know that such geniuses come only when they are summoned; or, rather, we know that universal geniuses will concentrate their attention, in the manner and degree needed, upon the great fact of the moral ideal, only when whole classes, whole communities, of people count it the chief asset in the welfare of individuals and nations.

In some passages of the foregoing paragraphs we may have seemed to imply that only professional experts are to apply the scientific method to the facts of the moral life. But in reality we mean far more. As the number of specialists increases, their practice and habit of investigation, and their conclusions, will spread to their own pupils and disciples. These in turn—as fathers and mothers, as school-teachers, as preachers and writers—will spread to far wider circles both the practice of scientific investigation of ethical facts and also the generalisations which

* See above, p. 95.

have been verified. The time will come when nobody will approach the facts of the moral life in any other spirit than that of science, nor by any other road than that of observation, generalisation and verification. We believe, moreover, that we are not saying too much for the Ethical Movement in claiming for it that it has already done something towards advancing scientific investigation of ethical facts, even in the formulation of the Principles of the Union of Ethical Societies, and in the issuing of this volume in elucidation of those Principles. We believe that we have hereby strengthened what Professor James, in his humorous way, would call the " prejudice " that there *is* a moral ideal; and have done something in the way of classification and generalisation, if only on the mere descriptive level.

Unhappily, many persons not only do not believe that there is at present such a thing as a science of ethics, they do not even entertain our hope of such a science. On the contrary, they hold that a science of ethics is impossible. Indeed, some of the best experts of modern times in observing, generalising, and verifying the facts of the moral life, have come, as the result of their investigations, to the conclusion that the moral life, or the moral ideal which is at the heart of our moral judgments, contains within itself a self-contradiction. Professor Henry Sidgwick, for instance, declares, as the issue of his own subtle and laborious investigations, that two separate and reciprocally destructive principles emanate with equal authority from the very throne and sovereignty of conscience: self-interest and universal benevolence. If we obey the one mandate, we must violate the other.

Now, if the inherent principles of the moral ideal are such that in the very nature of man's constitution and circumstance they can never be actualised in this life, then either they are hallucinations and delusions, or they

point us to another order of existence which transcends the human power of observation, generalisation and verification. If this be the case, there can never be any such thing as a science of ethics. But to the members of Ethical Societies, the fact that a few ethical investigators have come to such a sceptical conclusion, instead of proving a discouragement, has been but an added spur towards renewed activity in investigation. One of the proofs that there is as yet no science of ethics is the fact that such a man as Henry Sidgwick came to such a conclusion. Inevitably, where there is not yet a science, there is seeming self-contradiction, and therefore the temptation to take refuge in the thought of a transcendent realm of existence.

It is an interesting and significant fact that no religious organisation in the world ever gave expression to a sense of the need for applying the scientific method to the facts of the moral life until the Ethical Societies did so. All the religions of the past have, equally with us, felt the lack of such a science; but they offered spurious substitutes—a supernatural revelation, an authoritative pronouncement of sybil or priest. Such being the attitude of all the historic religions, and such being the backwardness of the science of ethics, we see how unreasonable is the objection sometimes brought against the Ethical Movement, that it does not come forward with a fully filled-in map of life. Let such an objection tempt no leader in the Ethical Movement to be more specific, more systematic, than the actual state of the science of ethics justifies. There has been only too much ethical quackery in the world—too much dogmatism masquerading as insight and knowledge. Let us have the courage of our inevitable ignorance, and make no show of being better guides than we really can be. But our hope need not be long deferred. All the signs of the times point to a more

general interest in the scientific study of the facts of the moral life than any preceding age has witnessed. The Ethical Movement, being drilled in the consciousness of our shortcomings as regards the intellectual mastery of the field of ethics, will be alert to seize upon every new discovery concerning the nature of the moral ideal.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SUFFICIENCY OF HUMANISTIC MOTIVES IN RELIGION

Ethical religion bases itself on the primal instincts.—Psychological classification of these.—Their value as a basis for religion demonstrated by the new volitionalistic psychology.—Animal evolution aimed at preservation and well-being in this world; religion should do the same.—Supernatural sanctions appealed to instinct.—All religions have both a subjective and an objective basis.—The subjective basis identical in all religions.—The objective basis of supernatural religion unsound; that of ethical religion beyond all scepticism.—Hence our readiness to dispense with supernatural sanctions.—The domain of the natural resources of religion hitherto very little exploited.—Supernaturalism accepted the natural motives to good conduct, but naturalism stands to supernaturalistic motives in an attitude of complete rejection.—That rejection practical and volitional, not philosophic.—Why Moses and the Jewish lawgivers did not pay any attention to immortality.—Our Movement disregards immortality from the same motive.—Weakness of the defence of immortality as an additional but not indispensable incentive to the right life.—We equally, and on the same grounds, reject Spiritualism and all forms of occultism as a sanction to conduct.—The fact that religion has depended on belief in a deity and in immortality does not prove that it need do so.—What is meant by "Belief in any deity."—Both ethical atheism and ethical theism foreign to the Ethical Movement.

"The moral life involves neither acceptance nor rejection of belief in any deity, personal or impersonal, or in a life after death."

—*Seventh Principle of the Union of Ethical Societies.*

THE question has been asked a thousand times: What constraining power can ethical religion exercise, if it

detaches itself from belief in a life after death and in a transcendent order of spiritual existence? The direction in which the answer to this question may be found is indicated by the first Principle of the West London Ethical Society, which affirms that "the good life has supreme claim upon us, and this claim rests on no external authority, and on no system of supernatural rewards and punishments, but *has its origin in the nature of man as a social and rational being.*"

This statement, however, is little more than an index pointing towards the real power of the Ethical Movement. What are those forces and energies in man's rational and social nature which can support a superstructure of ethical idealism such as has hitherto been erected and preserved only upon the doctrine of an infinite personal Creator and of some sort of an existence of the human soul beyond the realm of time, space and causality? The answer is simple and ready to hand: religion without supernatural and superhuman sanctions bases itself upon the very same psychic foundations in man and his universe, upon which cities, states, families, literatures and philosophies have always been raised. Indeed, even supernaturalistic religions would have had no basis whatever, if they also had not appealed to these same abiding potencies in the soul of man.

The ultimate, absolute, permanent, and wholly adequate foundation for the religion of ethical idealism consists of the primal instincts of man. These instincts, as classified by the late Professor James, by Dr. McDougall and other psychologists, are fear, anger, curiosity, self-abasement, self-elation, tenderness, the instincts of hoarding, reproduction, construction, and the like. So long as psychology remained almost exclusively, but quite foolishly, intellectualistic—as if reason and logic were the supreme mark of man—it was difficult to see in human nature the

necessary foundation for disinterested and self-interested devotion to truth and to the good of all. It is only within the last two decades that students of the constitution of man have discovered that experience and reason in no wise supersede in him the primal instincts. On the contrary, underneath them, within them, animating them, are all the instincts of the lower animals, and possibly still others. The native, unacquired, specific dispositions of our psychic energy, our unlearned tendencies—these are the foundations of ethical religion. Because ideas, ideals, visions and purposes which can be realised in this life are the most powerful of all stimuli to arouse, direct, enhance and regularise the primal instincts of human nature, religion can well afford to dispense wholly with the doctrines of a life after death and a transcendent realm of redemptive energy.

It must never be forgotten that in the evolution of animal life, the whole dynamic force which engendered and differentiated the instincts, made exclusively—however blindly—for the preservation of individuals and species in this world. If a religion makes consciously and exclusively for the same end, it enlists into its service all the powers that have brought forth all animate existence.

The fact is liable to be overlooked that the supernatural sanctions to right conduct which transcendent religion introduces, would have had no potency whatever if they had not played upon the primal instincts and upon the organised combinations of instincts acquired through experience. They, however, while playing upon the native, specific dispositions that make for self-preservation and race-preservation, drain off these instincts towards a supernatural and superhuman sphere, and so thwart the natural cosmic tendency, setting up man against nature, and deforming nature into the enemy of man. But let us analyse more closely.

Any religion must have both a subjective and an objective basis. The subjective is the instincts. In the old religions, the supernatural sanctions played upon these. Nothing else could have made religion efficacious. We note, then, that even supernaturalistic religions have in this sense a naturalistic basis. Their objective basis, however, was the doctrine of a superhuman friend and judge, and of rewards and punishments in another life. But this objective basis, unlike the subjective, was never solid. Not only was it always in danger of being undermined by scepticism, if thought was allowed free play; but, even when absolute and implicit faith prevailed, the impalpability of the transcendent order of spiritual existences and the remoteness of the life after death rendered the appeal of the supernatural sanctions in great part impotent. These inevitable weaknesses of the old religious disciplines are clearly testified to by the blinding and demoralising magnitude of the rewards and threats—out of all proportion to human merits and demerits—which the priests were compelled to present to the imagination. Happily for ethical religion, while its subjective basis is exactly the same as that of the old systems of worship, with the further advantage that it is not counter to the trend of cosmic energy, its objective basis is beyond all scepticism. And not only this: the stimuli which it offers to the instincts are more powerful, because no energy is wasted in diverting them from their native sphere to a transcendent realm. On this account, there is no need of offering disproportionately vast and intense allurements. The test of the ethical fitness of a religious sanction is not how great but how small an incentive proves efficacious.

Such being the subjective and objective foundations of our ethical religion, it can be no occasion for surprise to anyone who has grasped the situation, that members of

Ethical Societies are quite ready to dispense with belief or disbelief in "any deity, personal or impersonal, or in a life after death." It is quite natural that leaders of a movement who are aware of the richness and power of the resources of their own domain should feel no need of transcending that domain.

There is only one circumstance which to the uninitiated might obscure the reasons for the self-confidence of the Ethical Movement. The greater part of the resources to which humanistic religion may appeal, without introducing the idea of a supernatural deity or a life after death, have never yet been opened up and used to the service of man. The unthinking public are not aware of the limitless powers in man and his universe which may be exploited. Indeed, had priests and lawgivers known the inexhaustible supply of energies which may be brought to bear upon the wayward will of ignorant and socially perverse individuals, supernaturalistic religion would never have arisen. The members of Ethical Societies believe that the unexploited resources of the instincts, and of the high natural and human sanctions to right action which can be made to play upon these instincts, exceed those already brought into service as greatly as the material resources of the physical universe not yet under the mastery of man exceed those already made to minister to his physical comforts and supremacy.

Designating as supernaturalism and superhumanism in religion the resort to a transcendent order of spiritual beings and to a life after death as stimuli to man's instincts, we must in fairness remember that such resort has never involved the total rejection of those stimuli which the realm of man and nature supply. Supernaturalists, therefore, do not stand towards the natural and human in that attitude of rejection in which the believers in purely natural and human religion stand towards the supernatural

and superhuman. The supernaturalists have always more or less fully and consciously acknowledged the necessity and importance and power of human and natural sanctions. The Ethical Movement, accordingly, will have no great difficulty in converting men and women who have once come under the discipline of critical philosophy and verifiable science.

The peculiar nature, however, of the rejection of the supernatural by the naturalists in religion must never be forgotten. That rejection is not a philosophic or scientific, but wholly an emotional and volitional one. It is the superfluousness and viciousness of the use of the transcendent objects which the priest of the supernatural introduces in order to play upon the instincts of man, which offends the modern humanist.

A very profound student of the Bible has pointed out that the reason why Moses and the Mosaic party in Judaic politics made no mention of, and expressed no interest in, the immortality of the soul, was not at all because that idea was unfamiliar to them, nor at all because they were speculative unbelievers in the survival of human personality after death. It was wholly because the attention of the human mind cannot be concentrated upon two disparate interests at once. It was because of the fact that one interest, if it is to be supreme, must organise, systematise and centralise the whole of the psychic energy of a people. Had Moses allowed the attention of his followers to be diverted to a transcendent order of spiritual existence and a life after death, he would have drawn off just so much creative energy and effort from the interests which he had at heart.

> The belief in the immortality of the soul [says the critic to whom we have alluded] must have existed in strong forms among the masses of the Hebrew people. But the truth that Moses brought so prominently forward, the truth his gaze was concentrated upon, is a truth that has

often been thrust aside by the doctrine of immortality, and that may perhaps, at times, react upon it in the same way. This is the truth that the actions of men bear fruit in this world, that though on the petty scale of individual life wickedness may seem to go unpunished and wrong to be rewarded, there is yet a Nemesis that with tireless feet and pitiless arm follows every national crime, and smites the children for the fathers' transgressions; the truth that each individual must act upon and be acted upon by the society of which he is a part, that all must in some degree suffer for the sin of each, and the life of each be dominated by the conditions imposed by all.

It is the intense appreciation of this truth that gives the Mosaic institutions so practical and utilitarian a character. Their genius, if I may so speak, leaves the abstract speculations where thought so easily loses and wastes itself, or finds expression only in symbols that become finally but the basis of superstition, in order that it may concentrate attention upon the laws which determine the happiness or misery of men upon this earth. Its lessons have never tended to the essential selfishness of asceticism, which is so prominent a feature in Brahminism and Buddhism, and from which Christianity and Islamism have not been exempt. Its injunction has never been, "Leave the world to itself that you may save your own soul," but rather, "Do your duty in the world that you may be happier and the world be better." It has disdained no sanitary regulation that might secure the health of the body. Its promise has been of peace and plenty and length of days, of stalwart sons and comely daughters.

It may be that the feeling of Moses in regard to a future life was that expressed in the language of the Stoic, "It is the business of Jupiter, not mine"; or it may be that it partook of the same revulsion that shows itself in modern times, when a spirit essentially religious has been turned against the forms and expressions of religion, because these forms and expressions have been made the props and bulwarks of tyranny, and even the name and teaching of the Carpenter's Son perverted into supports of social injustice—used to guard the pomp of Cæsar and justify the greed of Dives.

The writer from whom this passage is quoted maintains that the doctrine of immortality was turned by the craft and selfishness of Egyptian rulers into such a potent instrument for enslavement, and so used to justify crimes at which every natural instinct revolts, that to the earnest spirit of the social reformer it must have seemed like an agency of oppression to enchain the intellect and prevent true progress—a lying device with which the cunning fettered the credulous.

Whether this critic has given the right interpretation of Moses or not, he has undoubtedly presented the true explanation of the motives which have induced the Ethical Movement to declare that the moral life involves neither acceptance nor rejection of belief in any deity, personal or impersonal, or in a life after death. The moral ideal, we are persuaded, is a jealous God, and cannot tolerate diversion of attention and interest away from the spheres and the resources of its own actualisation.

Having noted that the rejection by the Ethical Movement of supernatural sanctions to morality is not of the nature of the denial of the existence of a transcendent order and a life after death, and having observed the positive nature of the motive which has led to the setting aside of the supernatural, let us now consider the scope of that which we thus reject.

Our Movement is jealous not only of that special revelation of immortality which it is said that the resurrection of Jesus Christ brought to light. It protests not only against this dogma of the Church and the historic evidence on which it is based. The Principle which we are studying is equally a protest against the strange curiosity and craving manifested by those modern rejectors of the old religious system who are seeking, by means of direct communication with disembodied spirits, to demonstrate the survival of human personality after death. Our

Movement in no wise denies the survival of the soul or the duty of science to investigate the problem, but it views with jealous alarm the motive which animates the prying curiosity of the present-day investigators. There is no ethical need of demonstrating that man survives the dissolution of his mortal body. We do not deny the existence of the soul after death, we protest only against the desire, the longing, for such a life. We view it with jealousy, as a craving which betrays in the mind an interest counter to that of the actualisation of the kingdom of righteousness on earth. It is not the fact of immortality—if fact it be—that we deny, but its eligibility as a moral sanction.

But we have not yet fathomed the depth of the clinging of modern men and women to the thought of a life after death. There are those who would concede every point we have made as to the independence of ethics, but who yet would declare that, were it not for the inspiration of hope in immortality, they would not have the strength, much less the enthusiasm, which would enable them to bear with serenity the trials of life on earth. They concede that a man *ought* to do right, even though he is to be annihilated at death; but they assert that he *will* not. They put the outlook into a future life upon very much the same basis as the possession, let us say, of an income of £300 annually. A man might readily concede that it would be his duty to live a highly upright and honourable life although he had not an income even of £50 a year; and yet would maintain that it would be very much easier for him to live up to the standard of disinterested service to the community if he was secured of £300 a year. Now, they reason, if the belief in immortality acts like the receipt of a sufficient income in toning up a man and making him equal to a firm resistance to temptation, how can one say that the good life does not involve belief in a life after death?

In the first place, our answer would be that the man who would cheat or steal because his income is only £50 a year is surely not an honest man. In the second place, the man who abstains from cheating and stealing simply because he is secure of an income of £300 a year, must be equally aware that he is no more honest than if his circumstances were so adverse as to lead him into cheating and theft. Mere outward conformity is not morality; only that outward conformity which emanates from inward deference constitutes character. One may say, then, that the degree of one's dependence upon the outlook into an immortal life is a measure of deficiency of character; and the effect of such a sanction is not to remove the deficiency, but to disguise and perpetuate it. When the Catholic saint desired that heaven might be burnt up and the flames of hell extinguished, in order that men might love God for himself alone, her aspiration was wholly of an ethical nature. Religious discipline, then, should aim so to strengthen the direct love of right for the sake of men on earth, as to render unnecessary the introduction of belief in a life after death; and nothing could more effectually reinforce the distinctively ethical motives than the affirmation of the truth that they are independent of supernatural sanctions.

The statement of principle which we are considering involves also a protest against the modern recrudescence of occultism as manifested in theosophy; and its protest here, again, is exactly analogous to that of Moses against the doctrine of immortality rampant among the Egyptians. On this account, there is no occasion to enlarge here upon the theosophic practice of cultivating the " astral " life.

Nor did the framers of our statement for a moment forget that in the religions of the past the moral life has, as a fact, been dependent upon supernatural sanctions. Indeed, the very object of framing our statement was to

protest that all those who have maintained that the moral life inherently involves the acceptance of belief in the supernatural have erred from lack of insight. It may be a fact that hitherto those who have led the highest moral life have found much strength and inspiration in the thought of a life after death and of a supernatural friend and judge; yet this does not in the least prove that such a belief was really essential. The ancient Egyptians believed that unless a virgin was annually sacrificed to the spirit of the Nile, the river would fail to rise; yet none of us to-day can for an instant believe that the rising of the Nile was actually conditioned by the sacrifice of a human being. That whole nations have believed their prosperity, individual and collective, to depend upon the appeasing of supernatural agencies can in no wise undermine our conviction that those nations were the victims of error of judgment.

It has been easy to see what the phrase "belief in a life after death" covers; but the scope of the expression "belief in any deity, personal or impersonal," is not so apparent upon the surface. It does not make quite evident what is the real meaning of the Ethical Movement. The framers of the phrase had in mind only a superhuman and supernatural deity. They followed the practice of common parlance, in making the word "deity" refer exclusively to a supernatural being. But it might have been well, in order to avoid any possible ambiguity, to insert the word "superhuman" before the word "deity."

For there are members of Ethical Societies who contend that any psychic being or purpose or tendency, although purely human and under natural law, if it deserves or if it challenges absolute obedience and reverence, becomes by that very fact a deity, and should be so named. They think, for instance, that the ethical ideal itself is, to those who worship it, God, and ought by them to be so

designated. For this reason, they would deplore the surrendering of the word deity and the cognate terms God and divine to the exclusive use of the supernaturalists. It is patent, then, to all who are intimately acquainted with the trend of the Ethical Movement, that the Principle which declares the moral life to be independent of belief in any deity, means only belief in any superhuman agency. Indeed, if we discard the question of religious nomenclature altogether, we cannot deny that the essence of the Ethical Movement consists in a setting up of moral ideals and tendencies as objects of highest reverence; and because it sets up these, it jealously protests against the deification of superhuman agencies.

Close attention will disclose the fact that this statement of principle makes ethical atheism as foreign to the Ethical Movement as is ethical theism. Ethical atheism implies that, if only the existence of supernatural moral agencies and forces were demonstrated, it would be necessary to make them the foundation of any scheme of human redemption. But the point of view of the Ethical Movement is quite different. We maintain that if to-morrow it were proved that there was an infinite personal Creator and moral governor of the universe, that proof would be no occasion for our incorporating a recognition of him in the religion which aims at establishing a perfect society for man by man. In regard to the existence of a superhuman deity, we may apply the language of the Stoic, and say, "It is the business of Jupiter, not mine." Conscience, man's creative energy, points to man and nature as the means, and to the realisation of man's constitution as the end, of religion.

CHAPTER IX

ETHICAL CATHOLICITY

Irreconcilable differences at present existing among ethical theorists.—Their mutual disrespect: Prof. Muirhead's view of hedonism.—The hope of a future reconciliation between divergent schools.—Facts which make possible an ethical fellowship without agreement upon any one ultimate criterion of conduct.—Ethical Societies do hold in common many points of ethical theory.—Moral judgments always precede moral theory.—The concrete judgments of theorists are not merely deductions from their abstract formulas.—All existing criteria of conduct approximately true and valuable.—There is, and must be, some one universal and absolute criterion of moral goodness, although it may not be yet defined.—We avoid sectarianism in order that we may help in developing the science of ethics.—Our Movement not a new religious sect.—Difference between a sect and a party.—Aloofness of sects from each other and from the Church.—Wherein the triumph of the Ethical Movement will consist.—Danger of churches falling into a new bigotry as they discard their ancient creeds.

"The acceptance of any one ultimate criterion of right should not be made a condition of ethical fellowship."

—*Eighth Principle of the Union of Ethical Societies.*

SOME few years before Professor Henry Sidgwick's death, a number of persons who wished to organise an international Ethical Congress, in which all the professors of moral philosophy and all the great writers upon ethics throughout the world should be invited to participate, approached him with an eye to receiving his patronage for their scheme. Without a moment's hesitation, Professor

Sidgwick refused in any way to be identified with such an effort. The time, he said, was not ripe, and possibly would not be for several generations. "What," he asked, "have the disciples of Professor Green in common with one who, like myself, accepts 'universal happiness' as the standard of right action? We speak a different language; we view the universe from opposite points of the compass." This incident shows clearly that to-day ethical theory is no more a bond of universal union among the men who have discarded belief in the transcendent origin and significance of the moral life than is transcendent metaphysics itself. In getting rid of transcendent sanctions to morality, we have not freed ourselves from intellectual differences. There are as many schools of purely ethical thought as of old-fashioned theology, and the members of these different schools understand each other no better, and love each other no more.

Under these circumstances, it would indeed be a pity if men and women who have broken free from the barriers of creed and sect should come together only to cramp themselves with a new bigotry; but there is always danger of such a calamity. Not only do the different ethical schools speak a different language and stand at different points of the compass, but they do not even respect one another. When, for instance, Professor Muirhead, in his admirable *Elements of Ethics*, speaks of it as our duty "to renounce hedonism and all its works," he betrays towards the hedonists exactly that spiritual haughtiness and contempt which has made the *odium theologicum* notorious. From his point of view, just as we must renounce the devil and all his works, so we must renounce the universal-happiness theory. And yet so saintly and subtle a spirit as Professor Henry Sidgwick was a universal hedonist! We therefore clearly see that at the present day, to make the bond of ethical union agreement

in ethical theory would be to reintroduce the war of the sects, with all its historic bitterness and pugnacity.

Happily, the Ethical Movement has avoided the danger of moral sectarianism. Yet it has not done so by a sacrifice of intellectual interest and intellectual integrity. It has not done so by surrendering the theoretical task of interpreting to reason and logic the life which is called good. Even Professor Henry Sidgwick believed that in a few generations it would come about that men of different schools would understand each other, and would talk at least in a common language. The time undoubtedly will come when ethical theory will not divide men.

But, it will be asked, how is it possible to have an ethical bond of union, if it be neither in ethical theory, nor in co-operation for specific moral reforms? If we do not pretend to do any other good work except preaching and teaching and organising in an ethical fellowship, and if we omit theory, what is there for us to be or do?

The true relation between ethical theory and the moral life makes it quite possible for us to teach and to preach, and to reconstruct religious and spiritual discipline, without introducing as an item in our principles any theory as to the ultimate criterion of right. We must remember that there was such a thing as correct English speech before there was any such thing as English grammar; and people could at any time have formed a union, based on a common interest in correct English speech, and one of their objects might have been to elaborate a logic of it—that is, an English grammar. They at the same time might have attempted to call the attention of the community to correctness of speech, and to the practice of a fine and discriminating use of words. In like manner, in the order of evolution, a certain development of melody and harmony must have taken place before there could be

a theory of music, or even the invention of a musical notation. Persons might have formed a society for the very object of inventing or improving the notation and also of elaborating the science and theory of composition, while at the same time doing their utmost to advance the appreciation and enjoyment of musical art. Theory, whether grammatical or harmonic, has as its subject-matter precedently developed speech or song.

In the foregoing paragraphs we have perhaps seemed to imply that the acceptance of ethical theory in general should not be made a condition of membership in an Ethical Society. But the formulators of the statement of principle which we have placed at the head of this chapter were guilty of no such sweeping indiscretion. They have not excluded all points of ethical theory from our basis of fellowship, but only that one which constitutes the storm-centre of controversy in moral philosophy—the ultimate criterion of right. At least six out of the nine Principles in our constitution are theoretical points, and are made a part of our common basis. For instance, the Union of Ethical Societies declares what constitutes for the individual the final authority in ethics; it commits itself to belief in the doctrine of evolution as a guide to the sphere of morals, to the notion that the universal method and spirit of modern science is applicable in this same domain; it asserts that in the hierarchy of motives, self-respect and love of one's fellow-men are the highest. It declares the self-sufficiency of purely natural and human motives to right action; it recognises the necessity of bringing economic conditions into greater conformity with the laws of social justice, in order that character, in its struggle with adverse circumstances, may not be at too great odds for human nature. In all these items of our faith we are committing ourselves to points or lines of ethical theory. In the world of thought, therefore, we

stand for something very definite—for great, main trends of insight and conviction. But on the one great issue which has divided thinkers into different schools of ethical theory, we purposely abstain from using any statement as a test of membership.

Readers will notice that the writers of this volume say nothing as to whether the ultimate criterion of right, as they conceive it, is, as the Stoics thought, to live according to nature, or, as the French Encyclopædists would have put it, self-interest, or, as Bentham, the greatest happiness of the greatest number, or, as Schopenhauer would have said, to follow the impulses of universal sympathy, or, as Immanuel Kant, to act according to a rule which you could will should become a universal law of conduct, or, as the Neo-Hegelians would say, self-realisation.

It is possible for us to abstain from committing ourselves upon this problem, because we have disciplined ourselves not to forget the fact of experience, that men's moral judgments in concrete cases precede their acceptance of any abstract theory; and, what is more, that even after they have become universal hedonists or believers in self-interest, or in spiritual worthiness or self-realisation as the essential mark of right acts and good dispositions, still, in concrete cases, their moral judgments are something far more than a mere logical deduction from their abstract formula. We incline to the opinion that no existing formula to express the distinguishing mark of right conduct and good character is wholly satisfactory. We think none can be so, until psychology has reached a far more highly developed stage of elaboration and verification. We think even that a deeper insight into the laws of social life and progress is necessary. Especially must religion, as an experience of the inner life and as an institution of society, be more fully understood. For all

these reasons it would, in our judgment, be a danger to the moral life of men and of society to attempt rigorously to apply deductions from any one formula as yet pronounced by any school of ethical thought.

Even if the ultimate criterion of life had been presented in a theoretical shape satisfactory to our moral judgment and to our discursive intelligence, we should discourage any attempt on the part of men to regulate their lives exclusively in strict logical conformity to that formula. For we know enough of psychology to be aware that the finest moral judgment as to how to act in any new circumstance must be the result of many factors and associations in precedent experience, which have inevitably ceased to be fully conscious. Were we always to act only according to the known elements of experience and social consequences of conduct, we should act pedantically, if not fanatically. It is therefore probable that the acceptance of any one ultimate criterion will never be essential to the security of right conduct, and could never become a just and catholic bond of ethical union.

In our sense of the inadequacy of all the current formulas as to the essential mark of right action is involved an appreciation of them all, as being each more or less true. We believe it a mistake to say that we should "renounce hedonism and all its works." Rather should we use it tentatively on occasion, as at least an approximation to truth and as probably, at times and for some temperaments, a better guide than the formula of Kant, of the Stoics, or of Schopenhauer. Each proposed criterion more or less fully covers the facts of the moral life when viewed in certain aspects, and more or less finely fits each individual question of casuistry.

It is, however, unnecessary that anyone should agree with us as to the inadequacy of all the formulas of the various schools of ethical thought, in order to recognise

the wisdom of not accepting any one of them as a test of membership in an Ethical Society. A man might be an ardent champion, let us say, of the theory that the essence of any right act is its tendency to advance universal happiness; yet he might at the same time feel the moral monstrosity of a proposal that others should be browbeaten or in any way constrained into accepting that special criterion; and he might prefer to remain in contact with thinkers of other ethical schools, rather than to co-operate only with those who held to his own peculiar conclusion on this special point. He might have a very deep sense that nobody should be coerced on any point of speculative thought. On this account, he would be not only tolerant, but even respectful, towards opinions conflicting with his own.

While the Union of Ethical Societies does not bind its members to the acceptance of any one ultimate criterion of right that has yet been formulated, nevertheless it does, as we have already said, pledge them to the Principles of its Constitution. And there is nothing in its statement of principles to imply that it cannot add to them. No one can carefully study the inner significance of the nine statements which this volume treats of, without realising that others kindred to them, vital presuppositions of them, or corollaries, could and must in time be set out in overt statements. Indeed, the only item of ethical theory which our Constitution warns us against attempting to formulate as a bond of union is that concerning the ultimate criterion of right. It will therefore be observed that throughout these pages we have felt ourselves at liberty to enunciate many principles in order to explain and justify those already adopted. And we have implied many more than we have actually set forth.

While we assert that no one ultimate criterion shall be set up by us as a basis of membership, we nevertheless

clearly imply throughout these pages that there *is* some one ultimate criterion. There cannot be two, but there must be one. Here we set our faces against the modern confusion of thought which implies that in the ethical realm it is possible for two distinct standards to co-exist. If there were two really different criteria, there would be two different moralities; but two moralities, so far as they conflicted, would annihilate each other. Logic is logic, in the sphere of the moral judgment as much as in any other. We maintain that there is a distinguishing and unifying characteristic of conduct and disposition which always marks off the right from the wrong; and that this distinguishing note, whatever it be, when found, would serve as the test of morality in every age, in every country, under all circumstances, and of the character of all rational wills, whether of human beings or angels or of an infinite Creator, or of demons or spirits or supermen. The ultimate standard of values is a standard of value universally. Surrender the standard, and you surrender the very category of value. There may be occasion for a " transvaluation of values " in general, but this process can never dispense with the distinction between right and wrong, or with the inherent quality, perhaps not yet defined, which makes the right right and the wrong wrong. It may be necessary, as Nietzsche contends, to advance " beyond good and *evil* "; but even this will not destroy the distinction between good and *bad*. Nietzsche himself never advocated a transcending of that distinction. Upon close and careful analysis, his plea turns out to be only a suggestion that we pass beyond conventional good and conventional evil.

Our welcome to persons who do not commit themselves to any one ultimate criterion of right, therefore, in no wise implies a doubt as to the existence of a universal and absolute test of moral goodness, but testifies to a

becoming sense of the imperfect mastery of all the factors in the ethical life yet attained by thinkers.

There is another reason why we are alert not to fall into the narrowness of an ethical sectarianism. Some of our societies declare one of their objects to be to assist in developing the science of right.* This does not mean that the members set themselves up as specialists in ethical theory; but it does mean that they believe that societies for the study and practice of the moral life, for the focussing of attention upon the claims and peculiarities of right action and good disposition, may render invaluable aid to ethical philosophers. It is most necessary that specialists should receive the testimony of a great number of persons trained and critical in moral judgment and introspection. Those acquainted with the work of psychological laboratories in modern universities are aware how much the theorist is compelled to trust to the evidence of the laity. The specialists submit long lists of questions; they tabulate and classify the answers. They trust to the experience of the unsophisticated yet conscientious and intelligently competent observer of what goes on in his own soul. If even religion is now recognised to be ultimately a matter of experience, how much more so is morality! Indeed, we have reached a time in moral and religious evolution when simple experience will not be adequate as the basis for the formulation of theory. Experiment is necessary. Test conditions are needed, and expert ability on the part of individuals to analyse their own moral judgments and to distinguish between what they actually experience and the interpretations and presuppositions which they read into their experience.

Thus it becomes clear that ethical catholicity will far better serve the intellectual needs of our time than ethical sectarianism.

* See above, chap. vii., pp. 93-94.

It has been easy to demonstrate the catholicity of our Movement; but the value of such a demonstration would be in part lost, if the notion were entertained that we are only one more religious sect—possibly the 374th that has sprung into existence in England. There is no danger of our being mistaken for a sect of Christianity; but, now that the comparative study of all the religions of the world has come somewhat into vogue, it has become customary to look upon the Buddhists as a sect, the adherents of Shintoism as another, and so on. Within this wide survey, the Ethical Societies have not wholly escaped having the finger of scorn pointed at them as one more religious denomination. But, however others may misinterpret us, it is far more important that we should know what in fact we are. A sect, as such, always attempts to draw all the world to its own organisation. The Ethical Movement, however, is attempting the very opposite—to permeate every religious denomination with its ideas. It is not trying to establish a Church and to draw all men unto itself, but to prove a leaven, not only in politics, in economics and in domestic life, but in religious organisations.

To understand our propaganda, it is necessary to bear in mind the difference between a sect and a party. The former withdraws from contact with rival organisations. A party seeks it. Think of the aloofness with which Methodists or Baptists have been contented in England for two hundred years! They are sects. They do not regard themselves as ecclesiastical parties in the historic Church of England, or look upon England as a spiritual organism of which their societies are an integral part. If they did, they never would have rested content with toleration and freedom. They would have battered down class distinction and privilege in religion, and entered into active co-operation, or at least into co-operative

antagonism, with the historic Establishment. They would have continued to fight for something more than liberty—for national recognition of their ideas.

The ultimate triumph of the Ethical Movement will consist in its having become superfluous, just as to the Anti-Corn Law League its triumph was the signal for its dissolution.

In order that all the churches may one day become purely ethical societies, it is most important that the Ethical party itself should stand rigorously for catholicity, lest the churches, when they drop the narrowness of mediæval creeds, should erect new barriers, more inhuman and pedantic than the old. There is such a danger. Even when all the dogmas of the old transcendent theology have been dropped, religious organisations might fall into such mutual antagonisms as now exist among the different schools of medical practice. The mutual aloofness of the medical sects was, until quite recently, as injurious to bodily health as the isolation and misunderstandings prevalent among the various religious organisations are to spiritual health and strength. Wherever our Movement's influence is felt, its catholicity will serve as an object-lesson to the churches, and thus prevent their falling into a new bigotry, more dangerous than the old, because closer to the practical issues of life.

CHAPTER X

ETHICAL FELLOWSHIPS AS SOURCES OF MORAL INSPIRATION

The need of fellowship a fundamental ethical doctrine.—Morality and religion essentially social.—The old Church doctrine an accident, not essential to the constitution of the Church.—Real service of all churches has been their function as moral fellowships.—Ethical fellowships indispensable.—Society composed of groups, each animated by some ideal.—A church expresses a universal ideal which subsumes and gives orientation to all partial ones.—The moral guidance of books insufficient.—The authors of great books derived their wisdom from contact with other living minds, not only from preceding literature.—Reading alone leads to individualism, not individuality.—Fellowship necessary also as providing sympathy and help.—Four ways in which moral fellowship aids character: (1) It brings the individual into contact with a variety of characters; (2) it provides an atmosphere of mutual respect and deference; (3) in it, the strong help the weak; moral virility is communicated; (4) mental power and independence is strengthened by clash of minds.—The Group-Spirit; its production the most important function of the church.—The psychology of conversion.—The new self a product of the surrounding group-mind, not of supernatural forces.—The dropping of supernatural theories will strengthen, not weaken, the efficiency of churches.—Frequency of meeting essential to the full benefit of fellowship.—Cause of the mental poverty of existing churches.—Power of idealistic fellowship for good greater than that of degraded fellowship for evil.

"Ethical Fellowships are the most powerful means of encouraging the knowledge and love of right principles of

conduct, and of giving the strength of character necessary to realise them in action."

—*Ninth Principle of the Union of Ethical Societies.*

THE idea that ethical fellowship is essential to the full development of moral personality is counted as a fundamental principle in the Ethical Movement. It is one of our immediate objects to establish societies which will provide such fellowship. We aim also at the conversion of other organisations now bound down by the dogmas of a discredited supernaturalism into fellowships having as their sole purpose and bond of union devotion to the moral ideal and its realisation in the life of individuals and of society.

Our Movement stands opposed equally to the dependence of ethics on supernaturalism, and to the mischievous and morally blighting notion that moral health and strength can be obtained in isolation, and without participation in the life of a group devoted specifically to the pursuit of universal ethical ideals.

Man is a social being, dependent for his mental, moral and physical welfare on vital connection with an organised community. Morality is social, being concerned with the relations among members of such a community. Religion, conceived as a willing and enthusiastic acceptance of an ideal of conduct in the realisation of which is the great means of glad reconciliation with life, is equally social. Psychology and sociology have made these facts so patent that there is no escaping them. How unscientific, in view of this, is the attitude of those freethinking minds which, having cast away belief in the spiritism of the churches, can see no object to be served by the continuance of such institutions, or the need of any purely ethical institutions to replace them!

For the fact that the churches have been teachers of

false views of the universe, and of crude and narrow notions of right and wrong, is but an accident, and not for one moment a consequence of their essential nature. The essential thing about churches is that they aggregate persons together, not to acquire wealth like a public company, or to enjoy pleasure like a social club, but to think about the higher ends of life, and to experience that greater recognition of such ends and devotion to them which association for such a purpose can alone bring. It may be quite true that churches only partially and very inefficiently perform this function, but it is not because they are wholly unaware of it. It is because, while their real power as means of moral inspiration lies in the fact that they are fellowships in the moral life, they turn the attention of their members away from the immediate and real sources of moral help, and occupy them with praising and propitiating spirits other than human and thinking about some state of bliss or woe awaiting them after death.

But, meanwhile, moral fellowships they are; however inefficiently organised in this respect, they exercise a disciplining, and sometimes an inspiring influence on their adherents. Were they to become fully conscious of their true function, and aware of the actual sources of their energising power, their capacity as redeemers of men and of nations would be increased a hundredfold.

Ethical fellowships are essential to character-building and to the communication of moral ideas and enthusiasm. Men must be brought continually into vivid contact with universal ideals of life, and helped by fellowship to live up to them. For it is only in contact with groups that ideals of life are developed at all. It is only in contact with a group representing a whole community that men attain a full consciousness of universal ideals, acquire quickness in applying them, and receive the fullest measure of joy in their realisation.

Society is made up of groups, and no man, even the most individualistic, can escape belonging to one or more of them and being ethically influenced thereby. Each group inculcates its own peculiar provincial ideals; it demands that in certain ways each member shall subordinate himself to its general will. In the workshop is to be found a public opinion which more or less effectively enforces certain demands. There are other such ideals in the home, the trade union, the learned society, or the club.

But those who do not belong to a given group are not brought into vital relation with the ideal of that group, and may not acknowledge it as binding. Further, it does not follow that principles acquired in one environment will be applied in another. The man who shows deference to the rights and feelings of others in his club, where the club spirit is organised and authoritative, may be a tyrant in his home, where there is perhaps no one strong enough in character to insist on right treatment for all; or the man who is a model husband and father may nevertheless not scruple to apply in his business means not wholly honest, but which the public opinion prevalent in his trade considers quite legitimate. Terms of exaggeration which he would not use as a lawyer or doctor may seem to him quite in place on the platform of his political party. Or in any of these connections a man may fail to see the essential heinousness of conduct of which as a sportsman he would not dare to be guilty.

To gain recognition of widely applicable principles of right and wrong, and to become conscious of inconsistencies in one's own life, therefore, it is necessary to be a member of a group which seeks to be representative of the ideal ends of life as a whole. Only in a church or some more specifically ethical communion is such a group even approximately to be found.

It may be urged that moral guidance of the necessary

character, and of the noblest kind, can be had without personal contact—it can be gained from books. Surely it is a sheer waste of time to enter into fellowship with Tom, Dick and Harry, however well-meaning they may be, when in the retirement of the study one may commune instead with Socrates, with Buddha, with Christ, with Marcus Aurelius! But morality is communal and democratic. Mere reading of books, if it were practically possible for a human being to confine himself entirely to their influence, would inevitably end in moral snobbishness. Great ethical literature itself is the product of minds in close and active contact with communities and keenly conscious of belonging and owing paramount duties to them. Christ came to re-interpret the Jewish ideals—to "fulfil the law." Marcus Aurelius was not only a statesman and a patriot, but no one has ever more expressly recorded his debt to others with whom he had personal contact—to the teachers and friends of fine character amongst whom he had the good fortune to acquire ideas and ideals in youth. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle found their great means of intellectual and moral stimulus in systematic contact with the well-meaning Tom, Dick and Harry of their day; and if anyone would declare this to be a mere accident, resulting from the absence of printed books, then surely it was a singularly blessed accident, for no systematic philosophers of the moral life have ever manifested a greater degree of freshness and insight than these men. In books, indeed, is to be found a real fellowship, and one to which it is an almost indispensable duty to resort. But unaccompanied by actual intercourse with persons committed to the pursuit of the good it has most serious drawbacks. It is passive, in that the reader receives more than he is stimulated to give. It allows of a process of selection which easily accentuates his personal bias beyond the

limits of healthy individuality. It gives to a self-righteous mind a false sense of superiority through onesided communion with genius, such as is only to be checked by exchange of opinion and the clash with other intellects. And reading alone constantly leads to habits of luxuriating in a region of ideals, with but slight prompting of the will to set about actualising them.

Not only as a means of demanding respect for general principles is a specific ethical organisation an indispensable need. It is equally required in order to provide an atmosphere of approval, disapproval, sympathy and help, such as shall foster observance of principles. It is in so far as they provide a spiritual environment that churches, or their equivalents, help human souls, and further the progress of righteousness in the world. This is brought about chiefly in the following ways.

First, a body having for its purpose the development of the moral life brings each member into association with a greater variety of persons than is to be found in the family, or in the place of business, or even the club—persons whose differences of character, culture and occupation, though they are all seeking the end of moral betterment, promote a recognition at once of the varied nature of society and of the right of all to kindly consideration and just treatment. A trade union branch, if that be a man's one point of friendly contact with a group, may only help to make him in outlook more of a carpenter or a clerk; a professional society may tend to make him more of an artist or a solicitor; a learned society more of a geologist or bibliophile. But an ethical fellowship, so far as it is organised efficiently to fulfil its function, stands for the community, for the nation, for humanity. Constant association with this representative group tends not to emphasise a man's particularity, but to make him more roundedly human.

Secondly, all the members of such a body meet on a plane where everyone is assumed to be deserving of respect. If a man meets other men in a club room or in a friend's house, they may arouse his curiosity or interest, toleration or dislike, but he does not necessarily respect them. The purposes of a moral fellowship, however, are such that every adherent, unless he discovers actual insincerity, is induced to feel respect for every other. Contrary to the custom elsewhere, he begins by assuming that the newcomer, by reason simply of his coming, is worthy of deferent consideration. Hence in belonging to such a group a man satisfies two of the deepest of human cravings—the craving to meet with respect and the craving for association with persons who command respect. This atmosphere of mutual moral deference, which is only to be found in fellowships really having at their heart a high ideal of human character, is one of the most powerful forces that can make for the production and preservation of good character itself. On committing himself to membership, a man receives something infinitely precious and, in the degree that he is capable of appreciating it, terrible to lose. The fact that his membership involves treatment with a respect which may be increased or lost follows him into his daily life. He is stimulated to act throughout it in such a way as would meet with the approval of the whole community on its ideal side, as represented in the fellowship.

It is not enough that society's general approval or disapproval of conduct should be expressed forcibly through the machinery of law and punishment. The most powerful sanction for right conduct, other than the approval of a good conscience, is that which is almost equally close at hand—the praise and blame expressed by men in their attitude towards one another. Nor must it be protested that to care for the opinion of one's fellows

is ignoble. Public opinion is one of the actual creators of the individual conscience; how often are we not individually blind to some moral distinction until the social conscience, acting through those around us, rudely forces it upon our attention! We feel shame at not having seen it, and from conforming to a principle from fear of censure we come presently to obey it habitually as a commandment of our own moral will.

Thirdly, in an ethical fellowship the weak are strengthened by association with the strong. Moral good health communicates itself; virile personalities arouse in others whatever possibilities of virility may be in them, promoting cheerfulness and energy, and checking any tendency to brood unhealthily or to whine. In a group of persons who meet together with the conscious intention to strengthen their sense of oneness with the community and to gain new willingness to promote its true well-being in all the conduct of their lives, the strongest moral wills all help in their specific ways to give the fellowship its tone. Those who are above all things characterised by a spirit of reverence for the good, spread reverence; those who are ever ready to serve create a spirit of service; those who have a deep resentment of social injustice stir others to feel the same; if any are known as active workers for social reform, association with them shames indifferent souls and inspires timid ones to commit themselves to doing likewise. Such leading moral types modify and help each other—catching from one another something of what each may have individually lacked; and all, by their presence, work, counsel and leadership, communicate strength of moral character to the rest.

If the morally weak are strengthened by contact with the morally strong, it need not and must not imply any fleeing from the world—any gathering together of the

more or less good in order to escape having any relations with the more or less bad. Such segregation is a wrong against society, and, besides, tends to defeat its own purposes. In joining a richly-constituted, closely-knit ethical fellowship a man will be so strengthened by partaking in the strength of the whole that he can better mingle with the world at large without injury. He becomes, indeed, not a merely negative eschewer of evil, but an active prompter of others, by example and help, to right living. In the home and the workshop, the social club and the political party, he will manifest a measure of moral independence which as an isolated unit he might never have attained. It is by becoming a positive force working for the general good that the hitherto weak man is rendered proof against temptation.

Fourthly, while "knowledge of right principles of conduct" is, as we have already seen, to be obtained in part from the written word—by reading "the best that has been thought and said"—yet to reading must be added the intellectual stimulus to be gained only through the personal contact of mind with mind. The spoken word is the most vivifying to the soul. Besides this, moral ideas not only are not fully assimilated until they have been thought out in terms of individual experience and feeling; but they do not acquire full roundness and sanity until they have been tested in discussion and modified in contact with the ideas of others. Where a number of persons assemble in order to express their convictions about any of the problems of life, the necessity of expressing ideas rouses the mind to intense concentration upon them, and that which was but partly assimilated in reading or but partly seen in private thought at once begins to take clear shape. Furthermore, where there is a conflict of experience or opinion, out of the antagonism, if a reverence for truth animates all, comes new vision; the dogmatic

are humbled, the dull are induced to think sharply, defects of insight are corrected, and from the mind of the group thus co-operatively thinking arises a measure of wisdom to which none of the minds singly could have attained. Here is a function which older churches, with their anti-democratic traditions and their distrust of the common intellect, hardly ever provide means of performing, and in so far their work as sources of moral stimulus and help is grossly incomplete. There is little real morality except as there is mother-wit. Life is continually bringing new conditions; moral principles remain mere rules-of-thumb except as they are intelligently applied to the changing circumstances of every day; and it is as much the duty of religious communions to help all their members to become awake and alert in discerning the application of the right, as to inspire them to do it.

But by far the most important function of an ethical fellowship—it is the fount of all its other benefits—is the bringing into being and keeping alive in each individual of that Group-spirit which is above and beyond each man's purely personal desires, and which alone can give a sense of greatness and permanent worth to life. In passing from an evil or morally indifferent life to one of devotion to an ideal of character and conduct, there is experienced a change of selfhood. The self is no longer a bundle of petty cravings and fears; it is a self which longs to become increasingly identified with the ideal—which, on analysis, is seen to be identical with the thoughts and purposes that would animate the whole community were it completely conscious of its nature and of the true way of achieving its welfare. Hence, when men rise to this higher plane and die to their lower selves, they have a feeling of newness, and speak of themselves as "re-born." Nor do they any longer feel isolated or helpless. Coming to care more for the good of their fellows, and to feel newly

stirring in themselves a character that is not self-centred but expands to live in the whole, personal worries fall away from them, their shortcomings seem to be swallowed up in new possibilities of moral effort, and they experience a oneness with something larger than the self they have hitherto known as their own.

This invaluable experience, unfortunately, lends itself easily to unscientific interpretations. According to the explanations which have generally been given, it seems to those who undergo it that the Creator has entered their souls, that the disembodied spirit of Christ has come to them, or the Holy Ghost, or Brahma, or some undefined " calm soul of things." So profoundly moving is the experience that until the progress of scientific study made it possible to understand its real nature, it almost necessarily seemed as though supernatural forces outside the human mind and human society must be the active causes of it.

But what the new psychology of religion sees is that such interpretations do not genuinely explain the uprush of new life. This is really a product of the forces in human society impinging on the individual soul until by their strength and insistence they transform it. The experience is the highest product of the fact that men are social beings. This dying to selfishness, and entering into enthusiastic communion with an ideal of unselfish character, has no meaning apart from social existence. And not only has it otherwise no meaning, but it does not develop and take possession of any human soul, except as the community itself, through some organised or unorganised channel, brings it to life. It is by membership in a group ethical in purpose, and through regular participation in its activities, that the Group-spirit is most powerfully awakened and a man's will reinforced in glad submission to its commands. It is in meetings where all

are seeking to be filled with it that its cleansing and inspiring work in each becomes most intensely felt.

It naturally follows that the efficacy of ethical fellowships to serve their purpose increases in proportion as they are consciously organised with an understanding of the ends to be gained and of the processes really involved. This does not mean relinquishing all the machinery of church organisation in favour of wholly new methods. On the contrary, it means in many cases deliberately amplifying long-established means the full worth of which has not hitherto been understood. The more churches have become transcendental in their conception of the sources of moral benefit, the more perfunctory have become their means of acquiring it. Take the essential fact of association with one's fellows: of how many churches to-day is it not true that no communicant gets into close personal contact with even so many as a dozen others! But experience proves that it is where each member is in close acquaintance with every other that the most salutary effects of belonging to a group arise. Whether in checking waywardness through remembrance of one's friends, or in the communication of the ideal spirit of the group to each member, knowledge by each of the personalities of all the rest is an extremely potent aid. It is when this exists that the moral fervour generated in a common meeting is most deeply experienced, and there is the most real commitment of the will, so that the subjective experience, instead of drifting into mere sentimentality, passes over into concrete realisation in service.

Going once a week to church is plainly an insufficient means of gaining the full benefit of moral fellowship. If religion has become so much a mere Sunday affair, and a byword as such, may it not well be because the whole week needs to be sanctified by more frequent meetings in

which the moral intelligence receives training, and the moral will is ever newly dedicated to the common good?

Again, so obsessed have the churches been by the notion that they have received a final and complete revelation from supernatural sources, that only with hesitancy do they admit the imperfection and incompleteness of the current moral code. It is possible to attend almost any church for years without for a moment being made aware that there are any profound moral problems pressing to be solved. The churches teach only the morality which the conscious public opinion of the community already approves, and, indeed, often lag behind even this. They can never regain their lost position as teachers of the nations until, by discarding supernaturalistic tests and encouraging originality of thought instead of a dull conformity, they allow the preacher to become a real interpreter to the community of the community's idealism. Knowledge and love of right principles of conduct can be communicated effectively to the mass of people only as those who are appointed to be leaders in moral fellowships are in close touch with science, philosophy and literature, and can present the living thought of the time to their hearers for edification and criticism.

It is the duty of an ethical fellowship to be a power-house, generating currents of energy which stimulate the intelligence, the idealism, and the will-to-service of all who belong to it. It should bear always in mind that it stands for the whole social community of which it is a part, and that its members are to be saved from absorption in their lower selves through citizenship and social service, quite as much as through contact with those who constitute the group. Men will have fellowship, and fellowship works potently either for good or harm. What the thieves' kitchen or the pothouse can do to lower men till they almost cease to be human, moral association can

do to raise them to the highest ideals implicit in the nature of their being. This, indeed, is the great hope for mankind. The power of ethical comradeship is greater, because it is disinterested; it can inspire, in those who see its true significance, an enthusiasm to promote it far stronger than any force which self-interest, however intrenched, can bring to bear against it.

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