

ESSAYS IN ETHICS

J. M. ROBERTSON









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BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

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# ESSAYS IN ETHICS

BY

JOHN M. ROBERTSON

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## PREFACE.

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THE following essays, as the headings tell, were for the most part delivered as lectures. Naturally some, if not all, were denounced by some who heard them as "essayish", and I hereby own the justice of the imputation. It is difficult to make abstract ethics actual, and no less so to keep applied ethics free of priggishness. Something went wrong, perhaps, when the term "ethics" was generally substituted for "morals." Given the drawbacks, however, certain problems have to be discussed; and the ensuing pleas seemed to me to need to be put.

Perhaps the case that now least needs urging is that put in the essay on "The Ethics of Vivisection," in part a criticism of positions which I believe are now abandoned by most, if not all, of the opponents of cruel experiments upon animals. But the analysis there undertaken is in itself, I hope, not useless; and in a Postscript I have sought to indicate what I consider the sound line of resistance.

Just as this preface is going to press, there is published the Rationalist Press Association's wel-

come cheap reprint of the late Mr. Cotter Morison's 'Service of Man', with an extremely interesting biographical preface by Mr. Frederic Harrison, on which I am moved to say a word, in view of the criticism I have passed on both Mr. Morison and Mr. Harrison in the essay on 'The Ethics of Propaganda' hereinafter.

On the 'St. Bernard' of Mr. Morison, Mr. Harrison pronounces that its treatment of its problem is "decisive, final, crucial, so far as history is able to decide. It is the life of one of the most perfect natures recorded by man. . . . It is a noble portrait of a real saint. And the brush of the painter is dipped in sympathy."

I will not here argue as to whether this fashion of settling a disputed question by emphasis of affirmation is or can be "decisive, final, crucial"; but I cannot refrain from comment on the claim that Mr. Morison did his work with sympathy. In the terms of the case, the sympathy was for one type, one ideal, one cause. I do not hesitate to say that it would to-day be impossible for any two instructed men, outside of the Comtist movement, sincerely to discuss the case of Abailard with less of sympathy than is brought to bear on it by Mr. Morison and Mr. Harrison. Neither in the modern Catholic Church nor outside of it has any-

one, so far as I know, handled the matter with such unmitigated animus. Mark Twain, indeed, dealing solely with its popular side, has recounted the Héloïse episode and its sequel with a natural indignation ; but on the question of Abailard as a mind, and on his relation to the mind and the movement of his age, it has been left to Mr. Morison and to Mr. Harrison, the one writing and the other discussing the Life of St. Bernard, to outgo all St. Bernard's posterity in the passion of their hostility to the man whom St. Bernard persecuted.

The truth is, Mr. Morison in his earlier days was always a partisan ; and to call his enthusiasm for his *parti pris* by the name of sympathy is somewhat to misuse the word. To hold warmly by one side in a dispute is the commonest of tendencies : credit for a special gift of sympathy is properly to be given to the man who can feel with the opposing side, the side to which he does not lean. And as against Mr. Harrison's claim that Mr. Morison did anxious justice to Gibbon and Macaulay, types with whom he was not spontaneously in sympathy, I am driven to repeat here what I have said elsewhere, that he did those writers, but especially Gibbon, flat injustice. In that stage of his development he simply could not deal fairly by types of mind which had never had

his own youthful bias to religious mysticism and fanaticism ; and his hostile verdicts on such types have for some of us, I am compelled to say, no more value than those of any religious fanatic. I do not dispute that he made frequent and laudable efforts to praise what he felt to be the strong points of the types he disliked : I am imputing to him not unscrupulousness but one-sidedness, zealotry, constitutional partisanism. In his latter years, I gather not only from his ' Service of Man ', but from Mr. Harrison's significant strictures thereupon, his early *parti pris* for Catholicism was profitably modified. But the fact remains that anyone who should discuss St. Bernard with such unrelieved *malice prepense* as Mr. Morison turned upon Abailard would to-day be pronounced an utterly prejudiced partisan.

Mr. Harrison in fact gives away the whole case when he tells us that Mr. Morison's ' St. Bernard ' was " written in sympathy, and it was prepared with sympathy, under the influence of three men—how very different, and yet each having much to tell us about an Abbot of the Middle Ages—Cardinal Manning, Thomas Carlyle, and Auguste Comte." It is necessary that some of us should bear testimony against the pretensions of these three distinguished teachers to speak judici-

ally on the problems of free thought, free speech, and authority. None of them has made the semblance of an impartial consideration of the rival claims ; and from the three in concert Mr. Morison could get a lead only to the championship of spiritual absolutism in the medieval world. Their collective "sympathy" was given to one view of medieval government.

For the rest, I am content to leave the case to be tried by the assembly of readers. It is a matter of deep regret to me to find myself still in opposition on this matter to Mr. Harrison, for whose attitude and doctrine on the great test question of the South African war I desire to express the most unqualified admiration. There he fought as hardly another man among us did or could for the great cause of Justice. But it is in the same cause, or, let me say, in the great twofold cause of Justice and Reason, that I continue to counter his treatment of a problem of the past which has a perpetual bearing on the present. I will say nothing on the practical anomaly of the part played by leading Positivists in holding up to odium, as the worst enemy of social order, the thinker, the questioner, the reasoner ; and in holding up to reverence as the model for humanity the dogmatist and the persecutor. I desire to go behind all ques-

tions of "sympathy" and appeal to the passionless tests of a science which a Comtist, at least, can hardly repudiate—the science of society.

J. M. R.

*May, 1903.*



# ESSAYS IN ETHICS.

## THE ETHICS OF PROPAGANDA.

A LECTURE.

(1897.)

TURNING over a newspaper file of five years ago, I read that at that time there was great trouble among the educated Hindu population of Bombay, on account of a series of handbills issued by the missionaries of the Bible Tract Society, gravely defaming the Hindu God Krishna. Public meetings of protest were held in temples, and a monster indignation meeting was to be held if the Government did not put an end to the provocation. How the matter ended I have not been able to trace ; but probably the missionaries were brought to order by the authorities, under the powers conferred by the Indian Civil Code for the prevention of mutual insults among religious bodies, as being likely to cause breach of the peace. What mainly concerns us in the present connection is, firstly, the policy pursued by the Christian missionaries, and, secondly, the position taken up by the educated Hindus.

As regards the missionaries, the action complained of, though somewhat abnormal in the locality, is historically typical. Nothing is more certain than that the Christian organisations have

in all ages held up to odium and ridicule the Gods and creeds of other systems. The cue is given in Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (x, 21), where he refers to the Holy Communion of a rival religion as the cup and the table of "demons". The original is not so violent in effect as "the table of devils", which is the rendering of the English version; but still it is disparaging, a demon being reckoned an inferior order of spirit, whether good or bad. And Paul's teaching was amply bettered by the fathers of the later centuries. I cannot recall one early Christian discussion of Pagan beliefs in which those beliefs are not at every opportunity treated with an unsparing bitterness of contumely and derision. It is not a matter of simple reasoning to show that they are unworthy: the Christian Father seems incapable of handling the theme otherwise than with a jeer or an objurgation at the absurdities and infamies he is exposing. The idea of respecting the feelings of the heathen, of doing as he would be done by, never occurs to him. And so far as we can gather from those documents expressly addressed to educated Pagans, the latter must have been in the habit of listening to bitter attacks on their religion with a forbearance to which believing Christians have rarely attained. Nor does it appear that their return criticisms were often in the key struck by their opponents. The rancor, the heat, the disrespect, are nearly all on the side of the "religion of love". Of course, official Paganism,

on political grounds, repeatedly resorted to violence against Christians ; but the temper of sheer religious resentment of so-called blasphemy seems to have been mainly confined to the ignorant Pagan multitude, who called the Christians Atheists, and to the educated and other Christians, who themselves habitually blasphemed the Pagan Gods.

Among the pre-Christian Greeks, again, we similarly find that the passion of resentment against all criticism of religion is special to the ignorant multitude and to those of the educated who made the highest pretensions to theosophic knowledge. Xenophanes had to fly from Colophon, and Protagoras from Athens, for moderately worded doubt and disbelief concerning the Gods ; and unscrupulous Conservatives like Aristophanes, themselves devoid of religious belief, were capable on political grounds of compassing the death of Socrates by working on popular bigotry ; but among the educated class the only notable type of homicidal fanaticism is Plato, who has always been singled out in Christian philosophy as the one truly religious thinker of antiquity. Plato it was who, in his Book of Laws, to the delight of Mr. Froude,\* laid it down that, though given religious observances may seem offensive, and stories told about the Gods may seem incredible, yet upon such matters the doubter must keep silence. " He may think as he likes about the legends of Zeus and

\* 'Life of Beaconsfield,' pp. 171-172.

Hêrê, but he must keep his thoughts to himself : a man who brings into contempt the creed of his country is the deepest of criminals : he deserves death and nothing less. *Thanato zemioustho*—‘Let him die for it’—a remarkable expression,” Mr. Froude observes, “to have been used by the wisest and gentlest of human lawgivers.” On which one would say that the last clause is a remarkable expression to apply to a man who in the first place was not a lawgiver at all, but only a speculator, and who in the next place proposed to meet with the last extremity of physical force criticisms of religion which he expressly admitted to be true, and of which he himself had in earlier life produced examples. It may be argued that Plato is here exhibiting his political rather than his religious side. But the truth is that in his case the fundamental instinct plays indifferently through the two channels, and the religious consciousness comes to be shaped by the same forces as shape the political. It is characteristic of the ‘Laws’, as Grote has noted, that there the older Platonic doctrine as to conduct and politics is “much more merged in dogmatic theology than in the other dialogues” ;\* and that his proposed penal laws are “discharges of ethical antipathy and hostility against types of character conceived by himself”.† In the words of the same just

\* ‘Plato and Other Companions of Sokrates,’ ed. 1885, iv, 276.

† *Ibid.* p. 411.

critic : " Plato begins his career with the confessed ignorance and philosophical negative of Sokrates ; he closes it with the peremptory dictatorial affirmative of Lykurgus ".† Mr. Froude, on study, might have recognised the parallel to his own intellectual career, and to that of his modern master.

Plato's development has indeed its tragic side. It was after seeing the utter failure of his philosophy to rule aright the conduct of rulers at Syracuse—after himself failing, through sheer excess of Puritanism, to turn to account his great political opportunity there with the younger Dionysius; after seeing his great disciple, Dion, fail similarly, for lack of political tact, dying by the hand of his co-disciple Kallippus—it was after all this demonstration that philosophers could not be kings, or kings philosophers, that in his old age the critic of other men's dogmatisms turned chief of dogmatists. The conservatism of Plato is the conservatism of despair ; and of that despair his veto on freedom of speech is the most significant expression.

What it broadly signifies to the retrospective eye is that in the idealist's ideal the inner spirit of Greek life was to become as that of the life of the despotic East—the type of intellectual unprogressiveness. It was through such channels of imitation that the spirit of dogma and persecution gradually flooded the Western world, long after Plato's time. The Christian ideal of intoler-

† *Ibid.* vol. i, *pref.*

ance derives from the Jews, to whom the change of belief had never come save by forcible pressure from outside, and for whom the aggregate of sacred books at length came to represent, in that inner life of sacerdotalism which political pressure could no longer affect, the absolute and unrenewable standard and storehouse of truth. And the later systematic intolerance of the Christian Church, which so long outwent in practical success all Oriental theocracy, represents in turn the application to the inner life, to the life of thought and speculation, of the political methods of the Roman Empire, the most triumphant development in Europe of the Oriental ideal of despotism, the most comprehensive check ever laid upon the forces of progress. One polity for all, with no possibility of strife—that was the ideal of the Empire, which disarmed its subjects to make them orderly, and so prepared the triumph of the barbarian invader. One body of opinion for all, with no possibility of innovation—that was the ideal of the Papacy, which kept men for ages unable to think, and left them unable to debate without resorting to mortal schism and world-wide war.

This, it will be said by some, is an unsympathetic view of the case, taking no account of the services done to mankind by organisation in times of intellectual beginning. Such a criticism raises for us the main question at issue: Is it ever wise, wise from the point of view of rational science, to gag the tongue of innovation? Are we ever

rationally called upon to take up, in a civilised way, the position of Plato, and say that doubts upon any matter of habitual doctrine are to be suppressed, in the interests of the commonweal? Such a position has been taken up, if not as regards our own day, at least as regards the Middle Ages, by the school of Comte; and the principle is brought to a concrete issue by two able English writers of that school in the discussion of a very interesting mediæval case—that of Abailard and his ecclesiastical antagonist, St. Bernard of Clairvaux.

It is a little difficult nowadays to get any intellectual sympathy for Abailard. Not only is the tragic romance, which forever joins his name to that of Héloïse, so shaped as to put him perennially in the wrong; but the flaws of his character stand up in witness against him even on the intellectual plane. And faults always double in their weight and deepen in their blackness when their bearer is traditionally classed on the wrong side. St. Peter, in the Christian legend, basely denies his Lord at the supreme moment; but then St. Peter is held to carry the keys of the Church and of Heaven, and his place at the head of the twelve is not morally challenged. Robert the Bruce treacherously slew his competitor, the Comyn, in private parley in a church, violating the most sacred law of honorable intercourse; but then Robert the Bruce became the hero of Scottish Independence, and the typical patriot (who creates

the literary tradition) makes light of the crime as a picturesque feudal peccadillo. Saint Francis of Assisi, again, is recorded to have been brought to religion by a dangerous disease, the result of his youthful debauchery ; but Saint Francis receives none of the condemnation passed upon the lover of Héloïse. It is only the man on the wrong side whose sins remain as scarlet for posterity. The sins of Henry VIII may become as white-wash ; but not those of Abailard, who was classed as a heretic by Rome, without securing the favor of any other established interest. We must try to regard him for the moment, however, purely as an intellectual type, by way of trying in his person the question of the ethics of free speech.

After telling how Abailard, with an ample preparation in philosophical debate, took to critical theology, Mr. Harrison (proceeding on the work of Mr. Cotter Morison) admits that the critic was philosophically in the right.

“A consummate logician had little difficulty in making short work with [the orthodox theology]. It hardly needed the acumen of Abailard to devise a conception of the Trinity, the Incarnation and the Atonement, at once more logical and more scriptural than that of the school divines. There was not much philosophy in that feat. It only needed a practised logician, with the unscrupulous cynicism and reckless vanity of Master Peter. At last he had aroused and alarmed the French bishops, then the true depositories of all that was vigorous and lofty in Catholicism.”\*

That is to say, unscrupulous cynicism and reckless vanity were part of the outfit needed to enable

\* ‘The Choice of Books,’ 1886, p. 326.



a practised logician to frame a more logical and scrupulous system of theology; and when the depositories of all that was vigorous and lofty in Catholicism were confronted by this new theology, at once more logical and more scriptural, they became alarmed. On the next page, however, Mr. Harrison suddenly cancels the statements just made by asserting that

“The system of Abailard was *not* more demonstrable than the system he attacked. His object was only to replace a hypothetical system of belief, on which rested the civilisation of mankind, by a system just as arbitrary. . . . His dogmas were as gratuitous as were those of Bernard.”

“Just as arbitrary,” though obviously “more logical”. “Not more demonstrable,” and “just as gratuitous”, though clearly “more scriptural”—that is, on theological principles, better demonstrated. It seems impossible to carry on an argument from such premisses; so, without spending any time over Mr. Harrison’s various estimates of Abailard’s philosophical power, one turns to the more practical issue of the test by results, on which he thus pronounces:

“It was not till five centuries later that the Church opposed the development of science. To dissolve its dogmas, whilst science was unborn, was an objectless work of destruction. In Voltaire’s time the Church was the enemy of progress; in Abailard’s, it was its life. In Luther’s time the Church was systematically corrupt; in Abailard’s, it was the chief check upon corruption. Luther attempted some reorganisation of society; Descartes laid the basis of scientific philosophy; Voltaire attacked a persecuting system with courageous humanity; Abailard did none of

these. He did nothing to promote science, of which he was ignorant; and he only unhinged society, which he did not understand.”\*

And again :

“His only work was to paralyse the moral sense of his age, without doing anything to give a true direction to its thought. The part of the Catholic system which it was then quite premature to replace—its dogma—he did much to darken; that part of it which was then *most desirable to elevate—its discipline*—he did all he could to undermine. The small residuum of truth he uttered could have had, and was intended to have, no practical effect; the immense falsehood which his teaching popularised was to unchain the spirit of disorder.”†

Here we have, if an incoherent, certainly a forcible indictment. If this should fail to stand examination, it would seem difficult to make a case out against free speech on any other instance. The framer is a professed friend of progress, applauding alike Luther and Voltaire; he claims that Abailard’s position was morally the contrary of theirs; and only on that score does he in this one case condemn an innovating propaganda. Let us see, then, if the facts are as stated.

First of all, did Abailard “unhinge society”? Did he “unchain the spirit of disorder”? Mr. Harrison himself tells us that when the Council of the Church, after Abailard’s refusal to plead, passed a formal condemnation upon Abailard at the instance of Bernard, “*the question was practically set at rest by an authoritative decision,*” ‡ and Abailard died soon after, in the monastery of

\* *Ibid.* p. 327.

† *Ibid.* p. 328.

‡ *Ibid.* p. 329.

Cluny. How, then, with an "authoritative decision" against him, and with the question "practically set at rest", did Abailard unhinge society and let loose disorder? Further on, Mr. Harrison thus sums up the whole character of that time:

"The fact that stares us in the face, and which no satire can disguise, is that in the twelfth century men sought out diligently the purest, justest, and most earnest man they could find, forced him to tell them his opinion, adopted it after judgment as their own, and in all difficulties and perplexities waited for the sanction of their best and clearest mind."†

In such a society, then, how could one condemned and discredited logician, whom the mass of the people certainly could not understand—how could he unhinge society, undermine church discipline, and set up civil disorder? Mr. Harrison has told us that in Abailard's time the church was "the chief check upon corruption". On the next page, however, he states that the part of the church which it was then "most desirable to elevate" was its "discipline". Both of these statements can hardly be true. The indictment, then, begins to break down the moment we scrutinise it: on the very face of the case, some of it is incredible.

Looking further for ourselves, we find that the rationalising philosophy of Abailard was indeed spread far and wide by zealous disciples, but also that he was only one of many teachers who sought

† *Ibid.* p. 342.

to renovate theology, some of them in a far more drastic manner than his. A student who has really mastered the period, Mr. Reginald Lane Poole, points out that

“More intrepid views than his were promulgated without risk by a multitude of less conspicuous masters; Platonism was, in fact, the vogue of the day.”<sup>‡</sup> “The scholars of Chartres, for instance, following their natural tastes rather than any general principles, pursued the study of natural science or of the classics quite regardless of theology; in practice they even travelled beyond the borders of Christianity, and Bernard Sylvester in his cosmology would only admit theological considerations under protest.”\*

Abailard came far short of such innovation as that. He taught that the Bible must be true; but that we are not bound by the opinions of the Fathers—exactly the doctrine of later Protestantism. In several points, indeed, he outwent average Protestantism, as in arguing that the divine light was to be looked for not only in revelation, but in man’s reason; † but he did not seek to discredit a single Biblical doctrine.

On the other hand, anything done by Abailard to undermine the dogma of Catholicism was practically as nothing compared with the popular propaganda associated with the names of the Waldenses and the Albigenses, which was already potent throughout Europe, and which at the beginning of the thirteenth century was suppressed

<sup>‡</sup> ‘Illustrations of the History of Mediæval Thought,’ 1884, p. 175.

\* *Ibid.* p. 169.

† *Ibid.* pp. 153, 224.

by the Papacy by systematic massacre and devastation in Languedoc. These heretics attacked the dogmatic system all along the line. If Abailard was doing evil work, they must be accounted a hundred-fold more guilty than he. By implication, Mr. Harrison pronounces them agents of mere disorder. But in point of fact he does not once mention them in his series of contrasts, and, sooth to say, he seems to have forgotten their existence when he wrote his essay, though a survey of the period and its potentialities that leaves them out of account is very obviously defective.

Next, as to Abailard's influence on church discipline. So far from undermining it, he fought strenuously for reform, which was sorely needed. In this regard, too, he was one of many. Here, again, let us hear Mr. Poole :

“The men whose opinions the Church proscribed were just those whose activity was consistently devoted to the correction of the moral disorders from which she suffered. Roscelin, Abailard, William of Conches, are unsparing in their exposure of abuses in the state of the clergy which it was equally the desire of every earnest member of the order to eradicate. If Abailard's life be thought to be vitiated by a single fault, his colleagues are invariably blameless. The learned clergy are the exemplars of the age; the unlettered are its reproof. It was owing to the latter, to their degradation in life because in mind, that the Church stood in need of repeated, periodical revivals of religious discipline. The stimulus of learning was the least intermittent, and therefore the most trustworthy motive for moral advancement; but instead of fostering the seed of promise, the husbandmen of the Church rooted it up.”\*

\* *Ibid.* pp. 175-6.

And that this is not the view of an extreme Rationalist is sufficiently proved by the fact that within the Catholic Church itself, in modern times, the proceedings of the Council of Soissons, which condemned Abailard for heresy in 1121, are repudiated ; and those of the Council of Sens, where he was finally condemned at the instance of Bernard, receive only qualified approval.† It would thus seem that our Positivist friends are rather "more royalist than the king".

But let us go further. We have been told that Luther wrought no harm by *his* innovations : *he* was not premature. "It was not by puzzling good and sincere teachers of the people," says Mr. Harrison, "that Luther shook a corrupt hierarchy. Christendom cast off the vices of Romanism by returning to a more honest life and to the original virtues of the Gospel."‡ Again, what are the facts? Luther's Reformation, so far from purifying life, was on his own express and repeated avowal followed by the most grievous dissolution of morals throughout its German sphere. It was not merely that the Anabaptists fell into a license which revolted all their contemporaries : Luther bitterly testifies that all around him the standards of conduct declined ; and there is abundant other evidence to the same effect.\*

† *Ibid.* p. 165, n. 26.

‡ 'The Choice of Books,' p. 329.

\* Cp. the author's 'Dynamics of Religion', 1897, pp. 6-9, and refs.

Nay, by Luther's partial admission, his own doctrine of justification by faith had some share in the process ; many students think, a very large share. By that doctrine Luther assuredly did " puzzle good and sincere teachers of the people ". What can *not* justly be charged against Abailard can confidently be charged against Luther : his own friendliest modern biographers make concessions on that head. Then, as to the point of prematureness, we have the verdict of a score of scholars and thinkers, including Erasmus and Goethe, that Luther threw back the intellectual progress of Europe for many generations. Certainly the relapse of German civilisation in and after the Thirty Years' War was a disaster without parallel since the Dark Ages ; and that " spirit of disorder " was undoubtedly " unchained " by the success of Luther's schism.

It is hardly necessary to deal at length with the case of Voltaire. He was assuredly a beneficent and liberating force. But the remarkable thing is that every charge made by Mr. Harrison against Abailard has been made by a hundred writers against Voltaire, with at least a better show of justification. The unhinging of society, the unchaining of disorder, the undermining of discipline—these were, till the other day, the stock charges against all the French philosophers of the generation before the French Revolution. The modern answer to it all is that the true cause of the explosion was not the bringing of new light,

but the obdurate clinging of the champions of the old order to all its dangerous elements. The remedy became desperate because the case was kept so. And in the light of the rational vindication of the precursors of the French Revolution we see clearly the justification of Abailard, who, like Voltaire, was one of a band of thinkers bent on clearing the intellectual air. What happened in the twelfth century was that the forces of progress were crushed by organised clericalism, with the total result of delaying for four hundred years a measure of intellectual advance for which the best intelligence of the twelfth century is seen to have been fully prepared. It is mere question-begging to say that the attempted reform was premature. What is the proof? There is none, save the bare fact that the attempt was put down. But on that principle, the best thought of the best thinkers is always premature; and no less so the efforts of all the most zealous reformers. Wyckliffe was premature; Chaucer was premature in his exposure of the trade of the pardoners; Huss was premature; nay, Luther, tried by results, was ruinously premature. On that line of reasoning, where should we end? No reform could ever be broached until the vast majority were prepared to accept it without resistance—a *reductio ad absurdum*. To go no further: one would think that the last school to decry a propaganda on the score of its having been shown to be historically premature, would be the school of Auguste Comte, a teacher



whose hopes were as far ahead of possibility as any that were ever put forth by reasoning men. In view of his miscarriage, as of Luther's, we come to the conclusion that it is not a premature speaking of the truth that is to be guarded against, but a proclamation of error at any time. That was the vice of the Reformation ; and yet even as regards the Reformation we do not now argue against free speech ; because we recognise that the cure by suppression would be worse than the disease.

Against the Comtist verdict on the rationalistic movement of the twelfth century, then, we may squarely formulate this : that St. Bernard of Clairvaux, in the words of Mr. Poole, gave " an immense impulse to the growth of a genuinely superstitious spirit among the Latin Clergy " ;\* that the moral picture of him drawn by his adoring biographer and successor is thoroughly untrustworthy, being written very much in the spirit of the average ' Lives of the Saints ' ; that he was the unreasoning opponent, not only of Abailard, but of every innovating thinker ; that he hated all new thought just because it was new ; and that the ruinous Second Crusade, of which he was one of the most zealous promoters, did more to unhinge society than all the heresy of the Middle Ages could ever have compassed. Finally, as regards civil disorder, it is very clear that the

\* Work cited, p. 16.

atrocious crusades set up by the Papacy against the Waldenses and Albigenses early in the thirteenth century — crusades not to be matched for ferocity and destructiveness in all religious history — were simply the application of the principles of Bernard to heresy within Christendom. It was he and his like who “ did not understand ” society, because he conceived it as something fixed and unprogressive ; and he is finally, at best, the type of the unintelligently pious opponent of all intellectual advance. His influence struck at all rational culture alike. Mr. Harrison tells us that it was not till “ five centuries ” after Abailard that the Church opposed the development of science. To this surprising statement it is enough to answer that at the beginning of the thirteenth century a council at Paris solemnly interdicted the reading of Aristotle’s ‘ Physics ’, † then newly made known to the Latin world, while the Dominicans prohibited every member of their order from studying medicine and natural philosophy ; that Roger Bacon, after being long protected by a friendly Pope, was imprisoned for fourteen years, solely for his work in science ; that Pope Boniface VIII forbade all dissection as sacrilege ; that Arnold of Villa Nova was made an outcast for his persistent scientific work ; and that in the fourteenth century, Cecco d’ Ascoli was buried alive for asserting the rotundity of the earth, which doctrine the

† *Id.* p. 225.

Church had been anathematising on scriptural grounds since the sixth century. If, as Mr. Harrison says, "science was not yet born", it was the foeticidal activities of the St. Bernards of the Church that had managed it.

Enough, perhaps, of the mediæval problem. It rises for us afresh every day. No man can undertake a propaganda that strikes at established religious opinions without being met by one or both of two charges: that he is undermining moral sanctions, and that he is hurting people's feelings. The first charge, though we have just seen it pushed against Abailard, is going somewhat out of fashion as regards contemporaries; but the second is pushed by many who energetically repel the first. It is heard even in the new ethical movement, some of whose members disclaim all propaganda for the establishment of scientific truth as against religious creeds, and stand only for the rectification of conduct. Perhaps the most impressive form of the argument is the plea that by shaking anyone's faith we at once inflict pain and destroy a moral support. This was warmly urged by Kingsley on a young officer who made sceptical remarks in his hearing; and the argument is endorsed in one of the letters of George Eliot. These are moralists of high repute. And yet even these, tried by the test of consistency, are found to have had no better basis for their counsel than the personal equation of the moment, the self-regarding mood of a particular mental and nervous

state. Kingsley had no thought of condemning a *Christian* propaganda which inflicted pain upon Pagans and took away one of *their* sources of comfort. George Eliot, even in her later emotional period, would not scruple to take away what she held to be unsound sources of comfort from *non-religious* people, or to pain *them* by holding up some of their opinions to ridicule. Similarly, Mr. Lang, who sharply condemns Renan for destroying the inner comfort of many Christians, is zealous to discredit and destroy the hopes of myriads of men for the betterment of this life—hopes which sustain multitudes through lives of discouragement and defeat. You must not disturb the Christian's hope of heaven; but you are free to jeer at all men's hopes for a peaceful and happy earth; and the more pain you give in the process, the clearer is the evidence of your skill in satire.

When the more distinguished pleaders are thus seen to be merely special pleaders, it is hardly to be supposed that the average person who repeats the formula is on a sounder footing. One is compelled, in short, to say plainly that this charge against rationalistic propaganda, of wantonly causing pain, is as a rule the merest *ad captandum* pretence, by people who themselves are only too pleased to cause pain to antagonists if they can. I have seen it advanced by religious writers in documents which breathed malice in every other line, and which never referred to a rationalist with-

out a calumny or an invective. I have seen it advanced by journalists who could not write a page without inserting a sneer or an insult at some one whose views they disliked. I am far from denying that pain can be, and is, often wantonly caused likewise in propaganda. The truth is, the effort to cause pain is almost normal in controversy. Our political life exhibits it every day and every hour. But, that being so, let us try to minimise the hypocrisy of charging it solely upon that order of propaganda which is itself most maligned, and which is in the main the most disinterested. It is the simple historical fact that every new phase of rationalistic thought, in age after age of the Christian era down to our own, has been aspersed in the most ferocious way by those who held by the established religion, professedly "of love"; and that if words could cause pain to the point of death, no confessed Freethinker could have survived his confession for a year. Even at this moment, when positive legal persecution for unbelief seems extinct, there are thousands of religious people who would gladly ostracise an unbeliever to the point of pecuniary ruin; and who do their part in that way wherever they can. It is sufficiently piquant that after they and their kind have done their worst from time immemorial against all who crossed them, we should to-day be told that it is an unpardonable cruelty to hurt their feelings.

But let us not make the question one of mere

recrimination. It has another and a graver aspect ; because a main part of the answer to the complaint against the hurting of feelings is this : that if mankind is to grow mentally at all, some feelings must be hurt ; and that he who insists first and last on the comfort of his feelings, in regard to any matter in dispute, is merely affording proof of his own ethical primitiveness. Every important advance in our knowledge of things has hurt feelings in the stating. People in this connection forget that the denial of Satanic possession, the discrediting of sorcery, the proof of the rotundity of the earth, and of the earth's motion round the sun—all aroused the keenest resentment, and so must be admitted to have given pain. Where, then, are we to stop? Certainly there should be a sympathetic economy in these matters. No grown-up man will lightly undertake to convert his grandmother on any serious issue. Pain is not to be given at random, for the mere sake of shocking. But of the incidental or contingent shocks of the intellectual life we must all take our chance, even as in the physical life ; and he who would fetter free speech on the bare plea that in certain cases it gives pain, is simply playing the part of an enemy to truth, and of a hypocritical enemy at that. It is only one set of opinions that are proposed to be coddled, never opinions all round.

Of course, people spontaneously assume that the particular set of opinions which they most re-

sent having criticised are on a different footing from all others. This is a primitive hallucination. The truth is that it is merely the feelings which are *seldomest* questioned that are thus resentful of collision. There have been times when an attack on the British Constitution roused quite as much ire as an attack on the Bible; when the term "Republican" connoted as much aversion as was implied in the term "Atheist". These were, of course, the times when political orthodoxy was absolutely in the ascendant, and political heresy rare—the very times, one would think, when common-sense on the orthodox side could best bear opposition with equanimity. The trouble is that it is not common-sense that rules in these matters, but the much commoner contrary. And so it comes about that the struggling cause, the minority opinion, where that is a matter of reasoning and not of mere acquired prejudice and self-interest, is usually by far the more serene under vituperation and insult. It thus comes about that precisely as Christianity loses ground in point of numbers, and is more and more criticised, its adherents become gradually less resentful of the criticism. This is simply to say that they grow more civilised.

If this should still seem an unwarrantable saying, let the objector just recur to the case of our friends, the Hindu worshippers of Krishna, so passionately excited by the attacks of the missionaries on their beloved deity—so anxious that the

Government should interfere. If the Government did, it would be on the express ground that the Hindu populations are not sufficiently civilised to permit of free religious discussion among them. He who takes up the Hindu attitude is simply asking to be classed on the Hindu intellectual plane. I venture to surmise, indeed, that ere long the educated Hindus will have learnt a better way, and will have resorted to a counter criticism of the Hebrew Jehovah and of the ethics of the New Testament. In which case, doubtless, we shall find the missionaries complaining bitterly of the way in which these heathens lacerate *their* feelings, and asking the authorities to interfere.

In all seriousness, the ethics of propaganda are simple enough if we honestly handle them, first, by the test of doing as we would be done by, and, next, by the no less important test of the memory of what we ourselves have done, and what we have applauded when it was done on our side. The test of "good taste", so easily turned against an opponent, so easily ignored in our own interest, should always be applied under these conditions. The late Mr. Arnold, who so often earns our esteem by his good taste, his refined way of putting things, observes in the preface to his most famous book\* that "There is no surer proof of a narrow and ill-instructed mind than to think and uphold that what a man takes to be the truth on religious

\* 'Literature and Dogma.'



matters is always to be proclaimed." This in itself is perfectly true ; and yet if the principle had been applied by Mr. Arnold to all his religious heroes, how hard some of them would be hit ! The Hebrew prophets whom he so eulogises seem as a rule to have had just the cast of mind which he here condemns ; and Christians have hitherto reckoned it altogether to the credit of St. Paul that *he* held that his truth on religious matters was always to be proclaimed.

It needs, then, that we bring to the problems of intellectual at least as much vigilance as we do to those of our civic relations. Unhappily, most of us do no such thing ; and there is no such checking machinery in the former case as has been built up in the latter. If we merely cared supremely about speaking the truth, and about *not denying the truth* when it is pressed upon us, the disputes over propaganda would dwindle to triviality ; for the faults of all innovating propaganda on the side of feeling would speedily give way if only the opposing faults on the side of judgment, faults themselves born of feeling, were less inveterate. Of this one thing we may be sure : our anger at attacks on any of our opinions, as such, is as sure a proof of *our* imperfection as any harshness in the attack can be of the imperfection of the critic. The flesh is weak, and will at times confound the ideal ; but all the same, the ideal is clear—the ideal which even in an unphilosophic age was struck out for the contests of the body

among those who claimed gentle breeding — the ideal of strenuous struggle without fraud, hard hitting without unfairness, entire freedom from malice in every other relation, and entire repudiation of all desire to work any injury beyond what is involved in the fair struggle itself. Such was the rule for the knight of old: the civilised man had need aim at least as high, in his usefuller strifes and his saner vocation.

# CONCERNING REGENERATION.

A NEW YEAR'S DISCOURSE.

(1895.)

IN the history of man, certain words, standing for certain ideals and convictions of a bygone age, in time come to stand out like old boundary marks for a new civilisation ; and dwindle from the status of reverend monuments, which are part of life for a devout world, to that of strange antiquities, held worthy of preservation in the museum of learning only on account of their very strangeness. And as it has so often fallen out in the physical life of nations, where a newcoming race overruns a region without driving out or quickly assimilating the old inhabitants, and leaves them in the worshipping use of their landmarks after the land has been quite otherwise divided, so it happens in the intellectual life that you may find one tribe of believers cherishing the outward and visible sign of an old dominion, to wit, a word or a doctrinal formula, in the midst of a new polity, to which the verbal landmark has no living relation. At best, those who cherish it can but surround it in fantasy with the mental life over which it once presided, and in their own case seek at times to do it honor and revive its significance. They stand in the shadow of a name. Such a fate, or somewhat such a fate, has been that of the religious word, and the reli-

gious idea, Regeneration. For the mass, even of thinking men, it has become a more or less impressive metaphor, not at all religious in its bearing. We speak at times of the regeneration of a party, of a business, of a society, as we speak of a concern having "new blood" put into it. The phrases are equivalent, and they carry no solemnity with them. Even in the language of the pulpit, where old symbols are longest in use, it has become a phrase like another for the ordinary listener, who at most vaguely connects the term "unregenerate" with habits of profanity. Even among the professedly religious, it is only the few who are still alive to the mystic force that once breathed in the words "born again".

But a great and mystic potency there must once assuredly have been in that withered phrase. To how many ears must it have carried a strangely solemn message: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God. . . . Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." "Born anew" is the reading of the Revised Version; and already some of the solemnity is gone; and yet further the Revisers avow in the margin, as did the older translators, that the Greek may mean, "Born from above". And that is, perhaps, the true translation, "Born from above," or "Born from heaven". Here we are at once in the midst of ancient Gnosticism, which is as

clearly in evidence in the Gospels as in the lore of the later Gnostic sects so-called ; Gnosticism being in fact simply the spirit of original religious speculation, playing freely and ignorantly on the religious lore of the past. But although Gnosticism is for instructed men to-day almost synonymous with ignorant and irrational fantasy, as for churchmen it is synonymous with lawless heterodoxy, it is not to be forgotten that it signified for many minds in antiquity the deepest reach of spiritual insight, being, as we have said, a manifestation of the very spirit that framed all the religious systems, one after the other. And this fantasy of being born from heaven, it is easy to see, had a peculiar spell for the votaries of many cults. In the Fourth Gospel, the source of its influence on the later world, the doctrine is developed as fantastically as any Gnostic could wish : " Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh ; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. . . . The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh, and whither it goeth ; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." There the Greek word for wind is just the word for Spirit : we are in touch with a cult which carries us back to the primitive fancy that new vital powers are given to men by water and by wind. Yet out of all these primeval fancies, undoubtedly, there was built up an ethical

conception ; and the conception was ethical for the Gnostics commonly so-called who held it, and for the Pagan Gnostic cults which cherished it, as well as for the particular Gnostics who added those passages to the lore of the Christists.

It is not without profit to pause for a moment to note how perfectly childlike, how barbarically primitive, were those far-off beginnings of the idea of regeneration. The ethical heredity of man from a dimly enlightened animal is quite as well made out as his physical heredity ; and sooth to say, the tracing of it ought to give an enduring comfort to the thoughtful lover of his kind. For if man, with his ever-repeated desertions from his own ideals, his endless treacheries to his own cause, were indeed to be explained as a being fallen from a perfect state by his own inexplicable fault, then must his prospect be hopeless beyond expression. The forfeitures of the past can only be repeated : *deteriora sequor* is the motto of the race for ever. Its basenesses are but the expression of hereditary vice. But if it be that our kind has slowly arisen from the merest animality, and that the capricious admixture of good is the ever increasing play of something new, and not the forlorn flickering of something lost and irrecoverable, then there is a light of hope in the darkest place. Man's basenesses and benightedness are but the dwindling vestiges of the æons of the brute, and of the brute sophisticating into humanity. Our best current morality, if we come

to think of it, is not such that we need blush to trace it from anthropophagous ancestors, arboreal in religion if not in habits.

And so, when we turn to Mr. Frazer's learned and fascinating treatise on 'The Golden Bough', we learn without extreme astonishment that in the rituals of the most unqualified savages this idea of being born again is seen at play, and not without an ethical implication, as the ethic of savages goes. There the ideal of "dying in order to live", supposed to be a supernatural gift to one part of mankind, is part of the stock-in-trade of tribal sorcery. Among the aborigines of Australia, among negroes, among redskins, among the peoples of South American islands, we find the strange religious custom of treating boys at puberty as incurring new and supernatural risks, against which they are to be safeguarded by a process of initiation in which it is pretended that they are put to death and brought to life again. It is a regular annual ceremony, carried through with much earnestness and endless detail. Far from these barbaric mummeries, but without doubt on the same line of evolution, is the Brahmanic usage of pronouncing the Brahman "twice-born" on his investiture with the sacred thread. And of the same heredity, without doubt, was the initiation of the votaries in the great cult of Mithra, so long the formidable rival of Christism, in which a pretence of slaying the neophyte was part of the ceremony. In every case, the idea of

being "born again" is more or less clearly present; and there is no reason to doubt that in the old cults alongside of Christianity the idea had as much ethical content as it had in Christianity itself. To the primeval sorcery of the savage had succeeded the groping mysticism of the theologians and the moralists: the new birth was no longer a mere charm against evil spirits, it was in part a step towards a conquest of the evil principle in oneself. For many ages had men moved in this direction on the road of sacrifice and austerity, prayer and self-mortification. The idea that men become sainted by renunciation is no invention of Christianity: it is common to most savages and to all religious systems of the world. The current ideas of morality are to a large extent developments of ideas which may be termed pre-moral; ideas of sorcery and magic and demonic agency. And in the ancient ritual of the sacramental eating of the slain divine victim we have one of the points at which primeval mystic emotion joins hands with the instinct of moral betterment, the worshipper being held to be prepared by the mystic act for a new and better living of the present life, as well as assured of salvation for the next.

Let us not lose sight of the ethical aim because of the grossness and strangeness of the rituals on which it was grafted. Only by animal movements have men been able to rise above the animal to the life of reason. The great fatality



has been that the barbaric institution, being cherished in virtue of the spirit of reverence and faith, has served as much to bar the way to a higher plane as to foster the spirit which seeks that way. This ancient idea of regeneration, seized anew by the modern intelligence in the light of modern knowledge, may serve to express the highest reach of the moral instinct. But to do so it must be held with a new consciousness, far removed from the temper of ritual and mysticism. It must not be held as a ritual spell or as a sectarian password ; it must not be grafted on a dead tradition, an incredible faith. It must be a reasoned perception, deriving not as of old from ignorance but from knowledge. Instead of an act of faith it must be an act of doubt.

If we consider impartially the practical force, the bearing on conduct, of the idea of mystic regeneration in the ancient world, we shall see that there is small reason to attribute to it any wide transforming power. What regeneration meant for most of those who sought it was, first, the being saved for happiness in the next world, while the unregenerate were doomed to torture ; and, secondly, the being " dead to sin " in the sense of renouncing or controlling one or two carnal appetites. There can be no doubt that for the ancient pietists, sin figured mainly as an animal act, though lying and thieving and blasphemy were of course specified and denounced. That is to say, the believer had no perception whatever of his

most vital defect ; since thieving and blasphemy were not acts he would be normally prone to, and his notion of lying was crude to the last degree. It is no doubt true that in the Gospels, as in a fuller degree in the writings of the Stoics, we have gleams of a recognition of a higher and a wider need and possibility of reformation. In particular, we have one or two phrases which are quite startling in the completeness of their assertion of the scope of the moral law : " I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment ; for by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."\* And again : " I say unto you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment ; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council ; and whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of the hell of fire."†

These, be it remembered, are Judaic and pre-Christian doctrines, like nearly every other sentence in the Sermon on the Mount, being found in closely similar wording in the Talmud, whose compilers would certainly not borrow them from the Christians. This consideration may help some to take a rationally critical view of them. And when we do this, it becomes clear that though the utterers had come within sight of an intellec-

\* Matt. xii, 36-37.

† Matt. v, 22.

tual morality, a morality of the mental life, they had no properly intellectual hold of it. Consider the futility of telling men that they will incur the ferocious wrath of Deity if they give way to wrath. Anger is to be checked by a menace of the worst extremity of anger. Recklessness of speech is to be checked not by rational reflection but by the threat of police prosecution or eternal torture. The threatener is in fact allowing himself the wildest possible licence of the very vice he condemns. And even if the temper of wise self-restraint were not thus flouted in the very wording of the inculcation, it is sadly clear that the general drift of the Christian scriptures, to say nothing of the Jewish, is not at all in favor of self-criticism of the fundamental kind, the checking of the instinctive impulse at every outlet by the second instinct of self-restraint. In the very mouth which is made to utter these menaces against vituperation and contempt, the same documents put tirades of the severest vituperation and contempt. The uncritical worshipper endorses these tirades blindly, on the score that they were justified. But such justification makes an end once for all of the precept of abstention from hard names, for the tirades are directed indiscriminately, against whole classes of society ; and for that matter the inconsiderate railer always supposes he is justified, else he would hardly rail. Comparing the precepts and the practice of the sacred books, we can but conclude that in that era

of ignorance and social dissolution, some men had glimpses of a strict morality, not only for the bodily life but for the mental life, yet failed even for themselves to relate their conduct to their momentarily seen ideal, and of course failed utterly to impose it on others. We have only to consider the material of which early Christendom was made to see how impossible it was that the idea of regeneration should be for the people anything but a crude notion of bodily abstention here and bodily bliss hereafter. We find Paul reproaching his converts at Corinth for that in their eating of the Lord's supper "each one taketh before other his own supper; and one is hungry and another is drunken";\* that they go to law with each other before Pagan judges; that some of them scandalise Gentiles by their family life. It must needs have been so. A truly moral race cannot rise fortuitously or by mere preaching on a basis of ignorance and social decay. If regeneration is to have a vital meaning for us, it must be through our thinking it out for ourselves, in terms of our own problems, our own vices, our own ideals, our own science.

What then should it mean? Is the symbol at all translatable into modern and rational action? I think it is. Even for the ancient pietist, it meant in part an act of conscious self-adjustment to life, as he saw it; a saying to himself, Hence-

\* 1 Cor. xi, 21.

forth I am a new man, acting on different motives, following not my own will and instinct but the higher law laid down for me. Given a modern conception of the moral law and the purpose of life, may not the modern set up for himself the higher and broader ideal of renewal which befits that? First, what is the great difference between the ignorant and the scientific, the pietist and the rational, conception of the purpose of life? Surely it is the substitution of a terrestrial for a celestial ideal: the purpose of re-organising the actual life instead of the purpose of securing safety in a future life after the speedy destruction of a world that is past redemption. Given that substitution, the individual ideal of reformation, of regeneration, must be made to correspond. First of all, it cannot be a mere ideal of the domestic virtues, of the management of physical appetites, and the avoidance of the crimes forbidden by the ten commandments. The normal citizen to-day is not a drunkard or a debauchee; if he is covetous it is a good deal by force of circumstances; and if he lies in the way of business it is because he does not see his way clear to succeeding in business otherwise. To regenerate him in these matters there would be needed an alteration of the social system. To this we always come back. The new purpose of life being a purpose of social reconstruction, not an escape from a doomed world, the ideal of the new life is above all things an intellectual ideal, and the new idea of regenera-

tion must be above all things a regeneration of the intellectual man, of the man not as a unit in relation to other minds but as a unit in relation to an organic aggregate ; of the man as a conscious part of a whole, and that whole not a sect or a tribe, but humanity itself.

The old conception of virtue and holiness as a mere repression of the appetites, a life of hunger and celibacy, with endless ritual thrown in, is here left a thousand miles behind. No nation was ever destroyed, or ever degenerated, through mere wilful indulgence of appetite. No nation, indeed, ever died of its vices : the physical force of another nation is always needed to compass even the nominal death of a nation as such. It is not the physical vices and the cruder crimes that we need most to guard against, but the intellectual vices which allow whole nations to sink in physical vice for want of intellectual salt. Even if the danger before modern societies, as before the ancient, were the danger of overthrow by outside violence, which it is not, the safeguard would still be in the intellectual life. We realise that a country which undergoes a crushing defeat even in a war of its own provoking may confidently be pronounced socially corrupt to begin with ; and the cure of social corruption is not a matter of governing the animal appetites and getting by heart the ten commandments, but of developing intelligence in all directions. Thus did Prussia after Jena ; thus did France after Sedan. If we

in this country really run the risk of military attack of which we are always hearing, our inner danger will not lie in not having more ships of war than any four naval Powers, but in the lack of disinterested skill and science throughout the nation, in the defect of a hardy and happy populace, in the multiplication of ill-fed and sickly drudges, in the chaos of blind commercial self-seeking. Rome fell not for lack of mere armies, but for the lack of a social system that could breed vigorous and self-respecting men, and the brains to lead them. Even on the militarist view of life, a view which is becoming freshly prominent among us at present, the needed regeneration is a regeneration through the life of the mind, a treatment of society in terms of science, a study of human life as a social problem, and not as a problem of individual creed and individual salvation.

But it is surely not now necessary, for thoughtful men, to call up the spectre of foreign invasion in order to gain heed for the social problem. To the most moderately considerate man, the deep social disease, the vast domestic misery, is matter enough for pondering, whether or not there be an armed enemy to come. And if on all hands we are thus driven to seek for an intellectual regeneration, we may without more ado ask what should be its method, what should be its fruits. It is not a matter of proposing programmes, political or other, but of calling up that frame of

mind in which programmes can best be studied and appreciated. We are at the New Year, the time of good resolutions. What resolutions should a good citizen make who thinks of more than his own individual betterment in the year to come?

Perhaps we shall answer the better if we go back a moment on our distinction between the intellectual and the animal life. Of course the distinction is broad and inexact. There is no clear dividing line. As our physiological psychologists teach us, the whole man thinks. The intellectual man, the sociologist, has his personal prejudices and predilections; he is not the purely impartial truth-seeker of his own ideal; and nothing can hinder that Tolstoy shall see life in the light of his liver-complaint and his ageing physique as well as of his creed and his logic. The intellectual life, then, has its vices of bias and egoism and temperament, like the bodily or the commercial life. We gratify our partisanship, our prejudices, as we gratify our appetites, or our covetousness. But that simplifies our problem. If the regenerate man of the ancient world was to look to his simpler impulses and over-rule them, we must in turn look to the analogous impulses of the life of ideas and opinions. We must not only seek consciously the best and highest: we must examine ourselves as to the rectitude of our search, the strictness of our criterion. And if any man thinks this an easy or a small matter,



we may say with Emerson, Let him try to live by that standard for one day.

To begin with, how many of us, meeting with a new doctrine in to-morrow's newspaper—not in the leading columns of course: there are never any new doctrines there—or meeting even a reiteration by a new speaker, or in a new speech, of a doctrine we have already rejected—how many of us will consider that new or old doctrine for a minute with an open mind, asking ourselves whether there is really anything in it, whether we may after all be wrong, whether we are doing justice to our opponents, whether it would not be wise to propose a compromise? It is perhaps not inconsiderate to say that the majority of our fellow-citizens will do no such thing. If we are to judge by the history of certain modern reputations, and of certain modern doctrines, the majority even of the men who concern themselves with new books and new ideas have nothing but animal animosity for any writer who strikingly calls in question their beliefs or their prejudices. No doubt the animosity is less brutal than it used to be. No poet of capacity could now be vilified and insulted as were Shelley and Keats by the Tories of their time; no scientific theory, even if unamiably set forth, could meet with such ferocious obloquy as was cast by religious people on the earlier works of Darwin, the most amiable of innovators. Stupidity itself has progressed: it is wittier than of old. But it remains the spon-

taneous habit of most men to meet with scorn or sneer every doctrine, nay, every form of literature or art, which does not chime with their established tastes, never dreaming that it can be their duty to hear it and study and weigh it with scrupulous concern for justice.

This certainly holds true of the bulk of those whose profession it is to review new opinion, new art, new theory. No doubt the common run of journalistic criticism is below the common standards of criticism of instructed people, because journalism, with its immoral and humiliating commercial conditions, tends more and more to repel scrupulous men, and the men whom it does not repel are not likely to feel special concern for fairness towards opponents. But journalism, after all, only follows the ordinary drifts of opinion; the Press is an echo of the platform; and the platform rests on the average of the classes and masses. If most people were not recklessly unjust to opinions or arguments which clash with theirs, the newspapers could not falsify and asperse and misrepresent as wantonly as they do. The vice is normal. Now, as that very vice is its own means of perpetuation; and as the spirit of malice among men is the sure barrier to their general well-being, it is very evident that the cure must arise in a new consciousness, resting on knowledge. The mere growth of amenity of tone, though that is a great thing, is certainly not enough. Some admirable cultivators of amenity

have shown very little concern for fairness ; and well-mannered disingenuousness is only less disastrous to a good social understanding than ill-mannered disingenuousness. There must be painstaking over the matter of a criticism as well as over the manner. There must be at least the glimmering of a sense of shame over a flat inconsistency. There must be an awakening to the idea that to misrepresent a man is about as unworthy as to cheat him at cards ; and that to stand obstinately to a chance misrepresentation when it has been brought to your notice is as ignoble as it would be to deny an error in play or business when you have profited by it. In short, we want an intellectual ethic, an intellectual new birth.

We have no lack in this country of loud and austere criticism of a few forms of wrong-doing which a century ago went unreproved. Even in these matters there is sufficient of gross inconsistency ; and the most real political wickedness is openly condoned by moralists who wax prophetic over personal offences often much more conventional than real. Puritanism, which once meant a great deal more than prudery, has latterly come to stand for little else ; and we find people seriously justifying the abandonment of a great political scheme on the score that the leader of a party which chiefly promoted it has been in the divorce court. It is not that they think the scheme bad : on the contrary, they had been supporting it as a measure of beneficent reform : what

they are thinking of is the sin of co-operating with "a bad man". The welfare of a whole race is thus confessedly treated as of no account whatever in comparison with the duty of repudiating an "immoral" politician: as if this casting-off of the cause of despairing millions were not an immorality of the worst sort. In this particular matter, as it happens, Protestantism and Catholicism have joined hands; but the act, broadly speaking, savors much more of Protestant than of Catholic practice; and it is well to keep before our thought the specific dangers of evil action that accrue to our particular conventional code. To let habit do the work of judgment, and to take for licit all that is not customarily banned in the pulpit, is merely to let the moral sense atrophy. And there are always some who find their account in so doing. Politics seems to be a perpetual school of demoralisation, witness some perfectly matter-of-fact revelations which have lately been made of the ethics of American political management. We learn, from an apparently well-informed, temperate, and careful writer, that a local party-leader, with a high repute for the popular Christian virtues, a blameless family man, a total abstainer, and a regular communicant, has been known to ruin another, all in the way of party policy, by a planned series of private falsehoods and treacheries worthy of the ideal scoundrels of the Italian Renaissance. We shall do well to keep before us these samples of what Pro-

testant morality can attain to, of what the Puritan ethic can putrefy down to, when deprived of the daily light and air of fresh reason and new science. It can grow abominable for sheer lack of vivifying mind.

But if the mere Puritan instinct for certain forms of conduct can go thus frightfully astray, what is the likelihood that tradition and emotion will save us from utter licence in the intellectual life, considered as far as possible in itself? We have only to look around reflectively to see men who hold it their mission to correct immorality of one kind, themselves falling every day into a hundred sins of false judgment, false inference, false guidance, false criticism, false representation of fact. If the bad example of one man, in what we may call the personal life, can encourage or lead astray the tens, the bad guidance of such leaders of opinion in the intellectual life can confirm in unreason the thousands whose conception of social science will determine the next stage of society. It can be no justifying answer, on behalf of such a loose and incompetent thinker and teacher, to say that he is acting up to his lights. Half the vice he condemns is just as spontaneous and as unrepentant. If we are to sit in the chair of judgment, let us, in the name of righteousness, judge *every* line of action, every indulgence of impulse, every human self-gratification, with an eye to its consequences. Let us not call a bodily appetite a lust, and there an end, while we allow

an uncontrolled bias and egoism of speech and doctrine to pass as blameless because self-satisfied. Surely, of all ways in which we can be "materialist", this course of applying moral tests only to bodily actions or to intellectual actions which directly affect bodily interests, is "materialistic" in the most discreditable sense.

But such a standard, I confess, seems so remote from average feeling and practice, that some are likely not only to put it aside, but to find it unintelligible. Broadly speaking, we have arrived in our ethics at governing or proposing to govern the animal life by intellectual considerations, while we think fit to carry on the more strictly intellectual life, or a great part of it, in the non-moral fashion of the animal. In our very ethics, three times out of four, most of us express an inherited sentiment or prejudice rather than a dispassionately reasoned conclusion. And as there is so little anxiety about being vigilantly right, there is little remorse about being wrong, even when error is recognised: at least there is small thought of retractation. The old churches, with their old ethic, prescribed confession and penance for the sins of the flesh and the conventional sins of the spiritual life; and some have proposed the revival of these institutions on a public and non-ecclesiastical basis. But who proposes a confessional or a penance for reckless indulgence of prejudice, for uncritical belief, for scornful rejection of a creed or of a criticism without any candid examination

of its value? Who ever says or sighs, I fell there into a gross fallacy ; I fought for a sophism ; I vilified an honest reformer ; I did my best to dishearten a disinterested artist, and all out of inconsiderate prejudice and mental sloth : who makes these confessions even to himself, much less to the world? Instead of any leaning in that direction, we have ostentatious attempts to justify the unreasoning in their irrationality — treatise after treatise arguing that the sufficient justification of a creed is that it feeds the cravings of those who hold it ; that it is not to be tried by the tests of evidence or of consistency ; that the believer is a law unto himself in respect of his own interpretation of his own inclinations.

If a drunkard were thus to justify his alcoholism, *his* craving for nervous stimulation ; if a new sect, reviving the Antinomianism of the early and Middle Ages, were to announce that they held themselves free in Christ to follow all their desires ; if a philosopher pressed the idea of self-development to the point of saying that what others call vice is for him a pleasing experience like another, and that he will listen to no criticism, all other men would call it the very effrontery of lawless egoism. Yet this is the very spirit which, in the intellectual life, refuses to try certain pleasing beliefs by the standards by which men try all other beliefs. If any man were to assert that a doctrine in geology or botany is justified by the fact that it satisfies some people's senti-

ments, and that mere reason and proof are not to be listened to as against the inward satisfaction of believing, the spiritual sense of rightness, he would be regarded as beneath derision. Yet he would only be saying something strictly equivalent, in ethics and in logic, to what is being said afresh by a dozen serious writers on religion year after year. Of course we know that these writers are "sincere" and self-satisfied. Let the point be duly insisted on; and let us remember that the Antinomians of the past, from the converts of Paul onwards, were sincere and convinced and self-satisfied. It is not a matter of allotting blame, but of tracing consequences. And if Christian Antinomianism, or rejection of law in matters of personal action, tended in the past to the dissolution of society, we may be very well sure that the new Christian Antinomianism, which rejects the laws of reason and proof in matters of belief, can tend only to prevent society from evolving to a happier state. Half of the solid suffering of mankind comes of want of effective intelligence, want of intelligent accord, want of exact calculation. We may depend upon it that we shall never remove much of that solid suffering until we make as great a difference between our intellectual habits and those of our ancestors as we do between our methods and theirs in physical science. The abstruse alchemy of human relations will never be mastered by bringing to their study less of precision and impersonal concern



for truth than the alchemists of the Middle Ages brought to the very beginnings of chemic science.

If we reck our own rede in this matter, however, we shall have to anticipate reasonable objection ; and two objections do suggest themselves. First, is it not prescribing an impossible perfection to men who in the terms of the case are not aware of their misdoing, and cannot hold the ideal : is it not, in Voltaire's phrase, a revival of " the insane project of being perfectly wise " ? And, again, is there not a danger that an intellectual habit of constant reconsideration will leave a man sceptical of all things, without convictions, impotent ? Clearly, we may go astray in these ways. But I do not think the danger is freshly created by the prescription in hand. It is not, to begin with, a prescription of a quite new principle of action. Everybody admits that everybody ought to be fair and candid, ought not to be bigoted, ought to have an open mind for truth : even the Catholic who is taught to give no ear to sceptical argument is also taught to condemn the unbeliever who will not listen to Catholic truth. Even those who rush to a new treatise which promises to show them that irrationality is rational, and reason unreasonable—even these are in a confused way doing homage to the supremacy of reason. They want to satisfy themselves that they are somehow right. And everybody nowadays admits that it is wrong to falsify, to misrepresent. And although we find that a con-

stant profession of concern for truth went along with a constant resort to forgery and interpolation among the pious compilers of the Jewish and Christian sacred books, so that we can never, without anxious scrutiny, trust a single ancient document as being what it purports to be — still the modern sense of truth and justice has been developed sufficiently to make the ideal of intellectual purity a possible one for many. It needs, perhaps, that they should first learn how enormous is the harm that can be done by false reasoning. Even as false religious ideas, insane conceptions of revelation and divine devolution, have led to immeasurable bloodshed, so false economic ideas in the past have slain millions of men and destroyed untold wealth, while later fallacies of economic reasoning, albeit not directly implicated in bloodguiltiness, have sanctioned and will sanction blunders of social action which mean the misery of millions more. The platitude that “ Evil is wrought by want of thought as well as want of heart ”, kindles into a lurid record when you realise how much it can mean.

Doubtless the discipline that would avoid such evil is hard. It is only the mystic hallucination of righteousness that comes easy. The late Mr. Froude has recently been quoted as saying in talk that “ It’s easy enough to tell half-truths or white lies, or to say the weather is good, bad, or indifferent ; but to tell the pure, unalloyed truth is a task arduous enough for the profoundest

intellect—and yet it needs no education. It demands only heart and spirit.” Depend upon it, that last dictum, which characteristically contradicts the first, is an error. If anything in the world needs an education, the telling of the truth does. Merely to relate simple events accurately is a thing much harder than lying. It is only vice that ever dispenses with education: virtue cannot. But undoubtedly there *is* needed the heart and spirit as well as the discipline. In fine, you cannot make the silken satchel of righteousness out of the sow’s ear of animal egoism and animal ignorance by any machinery yet framed.

Still, it is no chimerical thing to look for increasing scrupulosity of thought and speech from mankind at large. We have not prescribed a visionary altruism, such as that of the passage in the Sermon on the Mount which tells the buffeted man to turn the other cheek. That prescription, by transcending so far normal human nature, has done worse than fail: it has left men heedless of a more rational limitation on vindictiveness. And I have not suggested an intellectual non-resistance, out-Tolstoy-ing Tolstoy. If even Tolstoy is consciously free to resist criticism sharply by words, we may perhaps count ourselves within the bounds of intelligent morals inasmuch as we use, always after careful reflection, the weapon of speech against those who seek to slay with it. It is meet that those who begin with the sword rather than the trumpet should be met with

the sword, whether or not they are to fall by it ; that he who seeks to chastise with whips for mere difference of opinion should himself, once in a way, be chastised with scorpions.

And inasmuch as reason does not deny to men this much of outlet for fundamental instinct, there is the less need to fear that the most scrupulous and habitual reconsideration of our creeds and convictions will weaken our will for good. It is one of the many verbal fallacies of the age to say that faith in one's cause is the main condition of success ; and it is one of the many ethical errors which go with lax reasoning to hold that faith makes any cause respectable. Even if the triumphs won by enthusiastic and convinced men had been won over men irresolute and unconvinced, the ethical justification would be all to seek. The triumph of Islam is surely a rude ideal to hold up before civilised eyes. But the triumphs of unwavering conviction turn out to have been won over equal conviction. It is not recorded even by tradition that Goliath went out doubtfully against David : the moral drawn there is different. And it is even recorded that on the eve of the Battle of Hastings the Normans were diffident and reflective, and the doomed Saxons confident of victory. To doubt before acting is precisely the best way to escape the mishap of having to doubt in the middle of your act.

But let us not put the motive in the sense of final utility, though the sense of final utility is

always the final standard, provided only you hold it high enough. Let us put the motive for ourselves in our own sense of the rightness of the self-denial which arrests the first cravings of impulse, whether towards lawless asseveration, lawless denunciation, or lawless denial, and makes self-doubt an abiding principle, even as the ancient pietist sought to do with self-mortification. Our age, with all its faults, is surely as capable of a sane ideal as any that went before; and the ideal of making Reason commensurate with action, and of making each day a conscious new beginning in the higher life, is surely fittest for the age in which above all others every day brings forth a new thing. The higher life has lagged sadly behind the lower: we do and experience so much that the science of the whole is obscured by the ever enlarging sciences of the details. But when we see that there is no other salvation for man than that which he can compass by his own thought, we shall surely rise to the height of that great argument, and seek in a new way to make a new world by being perpetually new men.

# ON COMPROMISE.

A LECTURE.

(1895.)

IT is one of the odd chances in the fortunes of words that the verb "to compromise" has at once the meaning of making oneself safe and of putting oneself in danger. A charge or a dispute is "compromised" by concession, and a man is "compromised" by being connected with something questionable. Can it be, one sometimes wonders, that between these significations there is a certain subtle ethical relationship, as well as that mere train of associated ideas which bridges the endless divisions in the senses of sophisticated terms? The problem is an old one; and despite much capable discussion it is perhaps as well worth reconsidering to-day as ever.

A more eloquent and earnest handling of it there certainly cannot be than the well-known treatise devoted to it by a distinguished living statesman, whom some consider to have given up to politics what was meant for literature, if not to party what was meant for mankind. Mr. Morley's brilliant essay 'On Compromise' was written more than twenty years ago; and in the interval he has been able to put his principles to some very shrewd practical tests. In his case, as in some others, it is natural to wish the performance of youth could be, if not re-written, at

least commented, by maturity. For some men the mere publication of certain opinions early in life is something of a security for their remaining of those opinions, as having given hostages to criticism, so to speak ; but in these days it cannot be said that such austerity of continuance is either much invited by example or strongly enforced by public sentiment. Twenty years ago,\* Mr. Morley himself endorsed Mill's remark† that " this is an age of loud disputes and weak convictions " ; and, supposing that to be true, we do not seem to have developed very much as regards our convictions, whatever may be the case with our disputes. However that may be, it must have struck some of Mr. Morley's appreciative readers as somewhat remarkable that he was lately introduced to the attention of the religious world in the capacity of a performer, rather than a student, in compromise. The story, as given to the world by a Nonconformist clergyman, is that the right hon. gentleman, while staying as the guest of an orthodox nobleman, was told that in consideration of his opinions he could of course dispense with attendance at family prayers in the morning ; whereupon he answered to the effect that nothing better pleased him than to begin the day with a sense of being in communion of sympathy with those about him ; and that accordingly he would

\* ' On Compromise,' 1874.

† ' Autobiography,' p. 160. Mill's precise words were : " generally weak convictions ".

gladly attend prayers. Such a private arrangement would be no business of ours were it not that it has been admirably made known to all the world by the clergyman in question, who sees in the episode a grace of character almost atoning for scepticism, and warmly commends it to the attention of mankind. It thus becomes, as it were, a broad hint to the rest of us who are of little faith, in our humbler spheres, to go and do likewise ; and it is not clear that the virtue of the example is supposed to be confined to participation in family prayers. The case seems distinctly relevant to the theme of the treatise I have referred to ; and it seems to suggest a reconsideration of that.

It may not, perhaps, be unduly presumptuous to suggest that the subject may profitably be handled on another method. Mr. Morley well remarked<sup>‡</sup> in his essay that the modern use of what is called the Historic Method has a good deal to do with habits of compromise. He calls that one of the "profounder causes of weakened aspiration and impoverished moral energy, and of the substitution of latitudinarian acquiescence and faltering conviction for the whole-hearted assurance of better times". Without committing ourselves just yet to the view that people in general are so much less whole-hearted to-day than of old, we may readily agree with him that "the abuse of

<sup>‡</sup> Ed. 1888, p. 28, *et seq.*



this [the Historic] method, and an unauthorised extension and interpretation of its conclusions, are likely to have had something to do with the enervation of opinion" in some cases. "In the last century," he remarks,\* "men asked of a belief or a story, Is it true? We now ask, How did men come to take it for true? In short, the relations among social phenomena which now engage most attention are relations of original source, rather than those of actual consistency in theory and actual fitness in practice. The devotees of the current method are more concerned with the pedigree and genealogical connexions of a custom or an idea than with its own proper goodness or badness, its strength or its weakness."

It might perhaps here be noted that the new method is not after all so very new. As the best biographer of Burke might have remembered, *he* last century set the fashion of looking to pedigree and genealogy rather than to truth in principles. "It makes all the difference in the world," says Whately in the sentence Mr. Morley puts as the motto to his book, "whether we put Truth in the first place or the second place." Burke certainly sought to put it in the second place, if not in the third. But the fact remains that in our own day a good many people apply his process, with more coolness, but perhaps not

\* P. 31.

with less effect, to present-day problems. And whereas Mr. Morley of old met this abuse of the Historic Method — this tendency to compromise about a delusion because it has a good pedigree — with the method of direct moral appeal ; and whereas the method of direct moral appeal does not seem to have been very successful in practice, there is perhaps room for another. I would suggest the Economic Method. A few years ago we heard a great deal about the correction of Political Economy by the Historic Method. Yet already, I believe, the tables are so far turned that, while Economics may still be partly expounded through history—as indeed it always was—we are now interpreting history by Economics. Not that that is a new expedient either ; but it is now being consciously and deliberately applied to every stage of human evolution. The first large fact in life is nutrition : nutrition then is the first large fact in sociology. It will not do to say that the method of “ economic determinism ”, as it is called, is the whole of sociological interpretation. No one key will open all the locks of the human heart. The trouble about all methods is that they tend to make methodists. But if you are the master of your method, and not its servant, it may avail you for much.

Let us now ask, then, how Compromise, good and bad, arises among us ; and how it affects life. It is at once obvious that in large part it is a necessity of social existence. “All combination,”

says Mill truly,\* “ is compromise : it is the sacrifice of some portion of individual will for a common purpose.” And combination is a very wide word. We may say that there cannot be so much as a dinner-party without compromise, to say nothing of political parties, churches, governments. Compromise, then, is so far a matter of simple common-sense ; and insofar as the broad divisions of sects and parties go, it is reasonable to say that there is too little of it rather than too much. The phenomenon, for instance, of two great political parties pulling dead against each other is not creditable to the collective wisdom of a self-governing people ; and we may hope that such wooden and inconsiderate opposition will gradually yield to the play of crossing forces, of new subdivisions of party. What we want, as regards public conduct, is compromise all over the field of activity ; not merely the compromise involved in the combination of Welsh and Irish to secure Disestablishment and Home Rule, or of Liberal Unionist and Conservative to prevent them, but the spirit of compromise as among the directly opposing forces, who most need it. We must all in a sense live together : let us do so as peaceably as possible.

And here it is to be observed that people who are all for compromise to-day in other directions where it is not at all as desirable in the interests

\* ‘ *Dissertations and Discussions,*’ i, 165.

of civilisation, are curiously laudatory of the uncompromising courses of other men in other times. Even Mr. Morley, who in general sees matters political with uncommon sanity, goes somewhat out of his way to praise some historic types whom in his own day he would have found "gey ill to live wi'", as Carlyle's mother is falsely said to have said of her son.

"To what quarter," he asks,\* "in the large historic firmament can we turn our eyes with such certainty of being stirred and elevated, of thinking better of human life and the worth of those who have been most deeply penetrated by its seriousness, as to the annals of the intrepid spirits whom the protestant doctrine of indefeasible personal responsibility brought to the front in Germany in the sixteenth century, and in England and Scotland in the seventeenth? It is not their fanaticism, still less is it their theology, which makes the great Puritan chiefs of England and the stern Covenanters of Scotland so heroic in our sight. It is the fact that they sought truth and ensued it, not thinking of the practicable nor cautiously counting majorities and minorities, but each man pondering and searching, so 'as ever in the great Task-master's eye'."

I respectfully demur to this estimate. For my own part I can feel more stirred and elevated by other contemplations. The personages in question refused compromise where compromise was right—that is, not in doctrine but in action; and the end of their action was to throw back progress of every description. It was because they miscarried that other men grew comparatively indifferent. I do not for a moment say they are to be held up to odium on that account: they belonged

\* 'On Compromise,' p. 113.

to their day and acted up to their lights, or some of their lights ; but at least we are not to single them out for a special praise which we deny to other men just as sincere in their mistakes. Our business is to study them and learn by them, not to praise them, save for the courage which they shared with their enemies. And the remarkable leniency with which they are often estimated must in some part be set down to a tendency which we have to deal with as a dubious development of compromise—the tendency to regard sincerity as a very fine thing in the days of Martin Luther and Oliver Cromwell or the early Christians, but as usefully superseded nowadays by other qualities. Social law is really not thus precarious. If it would be wrong for us to go to civil war to-day over Home Rule, we can hardly acclaim Hampden and Cromwell for resorting to it over ship-money, especially when we remember how Cromwell finally managed his own taxation. An essay on Compromise by Cromwell in the last year of his life, could he but have found leisure and the spirit of contemplation, would have been a priceless human document. As it is, the lesson of his career is just this, that if you will not compromise with other people over non-essentials you are likely to end by compromising on essentials with yourself.

But now let us turn to those forms of compromise which by implication we are all agreed in holding to be abstractly bad—all of us, that is,

who do not practise them—the forms of compromise which Mr. Morley attacked in his essay, twenty years ago. First of all, is it the case that these forms of compromise are peculiarly modern, or that this generation is peculiarly given to latitudinarianism and insincerity and moral impoverishment and all the rest of it? I have already hinted a doubt on the subject; and when I go back to Mr. Morley's teacher and predecessor, John Stuart Mill, and find *him* in his youth diagnosing his age in the same fashion, my doubt deepens. "There is a great increase of humanity," wrote young Mill,\* "a decline of bigotry, as well as of arrogance and the conceit of caste, among our conspicuous classes; but there is, to say the least, no increase of shining ability, and a very marked decrease of vigor and energy. With all the advantages of this age . . . there can scarcely be pointed out in the European annals any stirring times which have brought so little that is distinguished, either morally or intellectually, to the surface." That was written in 1836, nearly forty years before Mr. Morley's essay; so that those "better times" of "whole-hearted assurance" to which Mr. Morley points back must be somewhat remote and elusive. When we go back a hundred years, they seem to be still in the enchanted distance—with Cromwell and Luther and the early Christians. And, grant-

\* 'Dissertations and Discussions,' i, 171.

ing the sincerity of Luther and Cromwell, it can hardly be said, after all, that they represent the high-water mark of intellectual as distinguished from temperamental energy, or even that they are so absolutely unparalleled in modern times in respect of fidelity to conviction. The trouble is that the moderns who have been strenuously faithful to their convictions get overlooked as being rebels and blasphemers. Richard Carlile, who suffered nine years' imprisonment for freethinking propaganda—such men, and the men of the French Commune, are not counted for righteousness to this much-abused "age". Yet here too were energy and sincerity. May it not then be that human nature is after all not so vitally altered; and that what has happened is only a changed application of energy and a variation in the shapes of insincerity? May we not say that Mill answered himself when he wrote only a year later:

"Whatever man has been, man may be; whatever of heroic the heroic ages, whatever of chivalrous the romantic ages have produced, is still possible, nay, still *is*; and a hero of Plutarch may exist amidst all the pettinesses of modern civilisation, and with all the cultivation and refinement, and the analysing and questioning spirit of the modern European mind."\*

To clear up the matter, let us come to those forms of compromise which Mr. Morley assailed in his essay, and consider how they arise. He

\* *Id.*, p. 283.

specifies three provinces of compromise,† the first being in the formation of opinions, the second in the expression of them, the third in the effort to realise them. Of these the first may for practical purposes be set aside, the issue involved being not one of compromise in the ordinary sense. There can hardly be compromise in the *formation* of opinions. What Mr. Morley condemns in this connexion is rather mental indolence and prejudice than anything of the nature of compromise. We are practically narrowed down to the two points of expression of opinion, and action on opinion; and on the latter head we are agreed that general public action is clearly a proper field for compromise.

Where compromise is open and recognised; where there is no deception about it; where it is admittedly a means to a common good, it is really a good means up to the limits of our enlightenment. The real ground of debate, the sphere in which compromise tends to shade off from prudence to duplicity, from strategy to cowardice, is in the matter of the expression of opinion, taking that phrase to cover not only speech and acquiescence, but such action as is specially an implication of a particular opinion, as when, say, a man joins unbelievingly in a religious act, not in order to save his life but merely to save his purse or his reputation. In matters of positive or political

† Essay cited, p. 94.



action, we may reasonably agree to yield something in order to save something else, always assuming that what we yield is not another person's right ; but in matters of simple opinion and the avowal of it, on subjects of the first importance, the rightness of compromise is a matter of doubt at almost every step.

A few points may be instantly waived. No instructed person disputes that as regards expression of opinion there are fit and seemly restraints as regards times and places and persons. No one has the right to thrust unwelcome reasonings on his fellows without the excuse of repelling a similar aggression ; and no one does well to go out of his way to disturb, with such reasonings, minds which can get nothing *but* disturbance from them. It is quite unnecessary, generally speaking, to press these considerations on rationalists, save in the case of young enthusiasts, whose errors in the matter are those of youth and enthusiasm, rather than of rationalism. The great bulk of really aggressive and meddlesome obtrusion of opinion has always come, and probably will always come, from religious people. In the third century, Christians felt called upon to protest when Pagans said " Jove bless you " after a sneeze. Modern unbelief is less meticulous. The truth is that just as there is little compromise where there ought to be most—in the adjustment of conflicting ideals of joint or public action ; so there is endless compromise where there ought

to be least—in the avowal by word and deed of opinions on questions which need not and should not affect joint public action, save in the special matter of the propaganda of those particular opinions. The ideal of civic life, the life of collective self-government, is peace and co-operation, to the end of social progress: the ideal of the intellectual life, as distinguished from the life of civic action, is continuous criticism, to the end of intellectual and social progress alike; and the combined and complete ideal is, the reconciliation of constant conflict in opinion with constant amenity in action and intercourse. Strife in opinion there must always be; that is the one form of strife to which mankind seems inevitably committed. The problem is to let it play through intellect and not through malignant passion.

But we no sooner “see the better way and approve”, in the words of Ovid, than we run the risk of “following the worse”. And the risk is the more grave, and the evil the more persistent, because it really rests on economic conditions. Mr. Morley, you will remember, deals well and forcibly with the many arguments which people offer to justify dissimulation and reticence in regard to popular beliefs which they are quite sure are false. The arguments in question mostly resolve themselves into three: (1) that beliefs may be false and yet not do harm in proportion to their falsity; (2) that to attack such false beliefs may do more harm than good; (3) that false beliefs

will die out if left alone, the true ones being "in the air". Now, it may seem an exaggeration to say, but I do say it with confidence, that each one of these three arguments is put forward not by reason of a real or freely reached conviction, but half-heartedly and by way of finding an excuse for a line of conduct not cordially and spontaneously chosen. Mr. Morley's counter arguments are mostly unanswerable, and need hardly be repeated. I do not believe that anyone sitting down to make a scientific investigation, uncoerced by private interest or personal position, will dispute Mr. Morley's contention that the acquiescence in all manner of bad reasoning tends to promote bad reasoning and all the ills that flow from it; that there is no security for the welfare of a truth save what is given by spreading it; and that those who begin by dissembling on one point stand a fair chance of becoming dissemblers on others. The instinct of veracity is not so hardy in man that it can safely be kept indoors, unexercised and unbreathed.

All this is so obvious that it need not be enlarged upon; for in point of fact these very arguments are the proof that the instinct of veracity has suffered in those who urge them. We have only to imagine the turning of the discussion to some scientific instead of a theological topic, in order to see how unreal they are. Who ever proposes to compromise on the subject of the law of gravitation? If the old theory of dew can be

shown to be wrong, if the nebular hypothesis be supposed to be open to a new criticism, if a new theory of electricity be brought forward, does any one then suggest that error may be left to die of itself, that a false theory of electricity can do no harm? It may indeed be fairly argued that a theory of electricity has no bearing on morals, whereas a religious doctrine may have; but the general arguments about the inherent mortality of error must hold good in science if they hold good in philosophy. And while many people argue for reticence on the subject of the general belief in a future state, lest by upsetting beliefs we may upset moral principles connected with those beliefs, nobody nowadays seems to hesitate on the same ground about upsetting beliefs in ghosts and evil spirits and even in eternal torment, though every one of these beliefs has notoriously been connected with moral doctrine. Let us make an end of a fashion of dialectic that is really worn out; and let us do it the more readily inasmuch as the true explanation of it all is a thing to be stated more in sorrow than in anger. The truth is that men find all manner of arguments for not speaking out about false and absurd religious doctrines, because for so many men the act of speaking out is pecuniarily or otherwise dangerous.

The explanation, in fact, is economic. If there is more compromise to-day than formerly, more make-believe and timorous silence on the subject of the popular creed, it is because on the one hand

there are more people who do not believe the popular creed, while on the other hand these people are not yet numerous enough, or do not know themselves to be numerous enough, to venture on the open avowal of their opinions and face the pecuniary loss that may accrue. The "nation of shopkeepers" must in a measure have a shopkeeping ethic; and so long as the majority are believers, and as such are disposed to injure or boycott in trade those who criticise their creed, so long the shopkeeping nation is likely to be permeated by a habit of unworthy compromise on the matter on which there ought to be least compromise. And mere moral appeal, I repeat, seems likely to do little good, save indeed in so far as it makes new rationalists. When people feel a distinct economic pressure, whether they be shopkeepers or professional men, they will in general yield to that pressure; and they can effectively meet moral appeals by asking whether it is right for them to risk starvation for their wives and children. One of three things must happen: (1) either the economic conditions must be fundamentally changed, which is not a thing that can happen soon, whether or not we want it to happen; or else (2) the religious majority must be civilised to the point of abandoning the desire to injure the anti-religious minority; or else (3) the religious majority must be reduced to a minority by propaganda—a process which of course is difficult precisely in proportion to the amount of the

forces making for compromise. In any case, the principle of economic determinism is the main key to the situation.

If it be replied to all this that it is not mere economic need or self-interest that causes most of the acts of compromise on religious questions, but that love of moral peace is the main cause of the conformity of so many educated people to creeds in which they do not believe, I point to the strifes of politics, which show small concern for moral peace. And if it be urged that the amount of open conflict on political questions, again, proves that economic pressure is not so forcible as I have said, I answer that that is really the crowning proof of the proposition. Even on political issues, indeed, there is a great deal of compromise on economic grounds by people who fear to lose commercially by openness, to say nothing of the amount of make-believe by people who have no convictions, and can assume any that are convenient. But the mass of the electorate, probably, avows its convictions, and does not unduly compromise as regards the expression of opinion. And why? Because, to start with, the numbers are so great on each side that in general the risks of avowal are likely to be balanced by the gains of avowal; and because, for the rest, political parties are kept alive by the chronic pressure of problems affecting the economic welfare of the people. Men are naturally more ready to fight for their pecuniary interest than for a mere criti-

cism of a doctrine which only intellectually bears on life. Therefore it is easy to make a party for or against a political proposal. Therefore there is less economic pressure towards dissimulation, towards compromise, than in the case of a mainly intellectual movement. Only when sects are already large, and when their opinions—as is the way with religious sects—are held as passions and prejudices, can they be looked-to to energise for a doctrine as apart from an interest.

There is indeed one apparent exception to this rule, and that is the case of a movement of religious excitement, such as was the Wesleyan movement in the lifetime of its founder, and such as may have been the Christian movement at times in the early centuries. Here we have a sect taking shape, and its adherents facing ridicule and refusing all compromise. But even here the economic principle holds good. These new sects are formed among the classes that have least to lose by heterodoxy. As in ancient times the slave and the proletary were the first adherents of Christianity, their opinions being disregarded and contemned by their masters, so last century the then lowest grades of workers were free to follow the cult that attracted them, because their masters either cared little what they believed, or thought the religious form of excitement less harmful than other possible forms. Broadly speaking, the workers in the mass are least given to dissimulation and compromise in these matters, because

their incomes are least affected by avowal of heretical opinions of any sort. And as regards the early Christians it seems clear that, while they were in large numbers moved by an appeal which was really on the level of their previous culture and religious emotion, and when so moved were often ready to face martyrdom as Asiatics and other half developed races are known to have been in past ages and are now ; at the same time very large numbers were attracted to the Church by the systematic alms-giving it was enabled to practise through the gifts of those superstitious rich adherents who gradually multiplied as time went on. Thus the economic key yields the gist of the explanation in the cases where compromise appears to be little in favor, as in the cases where it is much in favor ; and the double test confirms the theory.

And now we have the decisive light on that other problem as to the alleged predominance of spontaneous energy and uncompromising directness in previous ages as compared with our own. Looking at the movements of Cromwell and of Luther in the light of our own political movements, we can see that there was really no peculiar stress of conscientiousness in those ancient outbreaks. They were, indeed, more violent, either resorting to or contemplating physical force at an early stage, whereas in our day we more and more tend to regard physical force as the worst of all means of settling or carrying on disputes.



But the total amount of energy has not proportionally fallen off, though in our day much more energy is consumed in the struggle for existence, leaving less for political explosion; and as regards the moral courage involved, the case must now be entirely restated. Neither in the resistance of the English Parliament to Charles nor in that of Luther to the Pope was there any lonely courage to speak of, — that courage of isolated men and groups which is in the warfare of opinion what Napoleon held “two-o’clock-in-the-morning-courage” to be in the wars of the flesh. Luther had by him and behind him plenty of sympathisers and supporters from the first. The economic principle had already wrought for him: many Germans were tired of paying Papal tribute, and beginning to be disgusted with the newer expedients to fill the papal coffers. Had the Pope professed to *give* indulgences as rewards either for penance or for merit or for church-going, the essential absurdity of the proposition would never have aroused a movement of reformation as did the act of *selling* the indulgences for money, though the absurdity and the immorality would have been just the same. As it was, Luther had half his world with him either at the outset or very soon after.

And so with the English Rebellion. The anti-Romanist feeling which underlay the opposition to the king’s demands was already fully developed. What of special innovating courage had ever been

involved on the Protestant side had been displayed by the brutal despot who overthrew the Romish Church in England ; and by the horde of mere plunderers who aided him in the work. Thus the Reformation itself had an economic basis : greed of nobles and other laymen for church lands. On that basis English Protestantism arose. And in so far as other feelings than established Protestant zeal were involved in the armed resistance to Charles, the leaders of the rebellion had an abundance of support and countenance from the first. Whole districts co-operated : Cromwell never stood alone for any cause, whether freedom from fresh taxation or freedom from religious oppression. Two large political parties stood arrayed against each other, and where there ought to have been compromise there was none ; just as to-day, when happily we have learned to do without civil war, there is still far too little compromise in practical politics, where compromise is most needed. And the human nature which then seemed to refuse compromise or dissimulation over questions of creed was the same psychic nature, barring modifications, as the human nature which to-day plays fast and loose with religious sincerity on economic pressure. Taxation and religion were in Cromwell's day the main matter of politics ; economic pressure operated mainly through royal taxation, which was the more strenuously resisted because commerce and industry were still primitive. In the evolved industrial

state, economic pressure is manifold and in part avoidable by conformity ; that is the difference. It is not that men are grown spontaneously insincere, though there was a distinct development of insincerity and indifferentism in the age after the great collapse of Puritanism, which had been led by zeal from headlong civil war to anarchy, to despotism, to destruction, till its every political principle was belied and its every ideal stultified. Then the economic pressure set in the direction of the new movement of power and politics ; and the average man resorted to compromise very much as had been the case under Henry the Eighth, when the conjunction of tyrannous power and lay greed seem to have produced as much of cowardly submission and prudent obeisance among Englishmen as has ever been seen in England since. What Protestant now acclaims Sir Thomas More? A late Protestant historian loudly applauds his execution. But Sir Thomas More exhibited a lonely courage of the rarest kind, beside which even the courage of Luther is not conspicuous. Clearly we had need revise our estimates of the past, of its sincerities and audacities, in the light of an impartial historical and social science.

We have reached at this stage, I hope, one scientific though simple result, in the view that those forms of insincerity and sham conformity which were so eloquently and justly condemned by Mr. Morley are to be explained as products of certain

economic conditions, in relation with modern intellectual movements, not as signs of any arbitrary or mysterious moral degeneration. And as those economic conditions do not seem readily alterable in any direct way, it does not appear that we may look for a speedy reform on the moral side. That conclusion may not unreasonably be regarded by those who agree with it as giving a new motive towards the alteration of the economic conditions. But it is not our business here to advocate or discuss such changes in detail ; and it remains for us to ask ourselves how, ethically speaking, we should adjust ourselves to the situation sketched—those of us who are concerned about its aspect. Is it really so little hopeful? If the economic conditions are hard to alter directly, may they not be altered to some extent indirectly?

Without venturing on any prediction, I incline to say that in one way they might be. I have said that the minority compromise in matters of religious opinion, either because they are so small a minority or because they think they are a small minority. Now, they are probably not really so small a minority to-day as many of them are apt to suppose. Unluckily, the very fear of speaking-out prevents them from ascertaining their strength: they are weak because they are unorganised. Did they but give each other mutual support, they would probably find, at least in the towns, that they could defy the economic pressure set up by bigotry ; and the bigots in turn

might learn sooner the propriety of compromise in the matter of business intercourse where compromise in the sense of mutual toleration should be the rule. In rural districts where there is much religious fervor, there is of course little hope of a pleasurable life for an avowed unbeliever ; and in this respect it is found that the collective bigotry of dissenting populations can compare with that of the worst of the State clergy. But in the towns it seems certain that there is a steady decline of real orthodoxy, which indeed, like the unreal, mainly rests on the economic fact that it is the means of livelihood of a whole army of specially trained men. Mr. Morley took the unbelieving priest as an extreme type of the compromising citizen ; and it seems certain that unbelieving priests are more numerous every year ; that is to say, there are every year, apparently, more priests who find themselves without real belief in the doctrines they are hired to propound, and who salve their consciences by the argument that good may be done even by means of a false faith. These men too are under economic pressure : it is so hard to win a livelihood otherwise. The more need for combination and organisation among those who feel that a false faith, preached when known to be false, must needs work far more demoralisation than good to mankind.

Such organisation should involve no element of sectarianism, no lessening of public co-operation of all kinds in matters non-religious. The atti-

tude of those Christians who will not even do the work of a Peace Society without introducing the dogmas and pretensions of their creed into the society's propaganda is clearly not to be imitated. Men may work for right reason as against religion, without setting themselves apart in matters political. Nay, there may even be organisation of rationalists for the purpose of mutual countenance and the promotion of sincerity without adding to these the work of propaganda, which is often difficult to agree upon. It might separately promote, for instance, openness and straightforwardness in such matters as the christening of children, their school training in dogma, the celebration of marriage, and the ceremony of burial. In all of these things there is grievous and needless compromise. The religious schooling of rationalists' children in particular is a most serious trouble. Thousands of parents who individually dislike the training thus given, yet allow their children to be subjected to it because they know that to be isolated and marked off from and nicknamed by its fellows is a painful trial to a child. To save it from this trial, the child is subjected to the probable future pain of having to reject beliefs forced upon it in childhood, to say nothing of the moral and intellectual darkening of the growing intelligence by the daily inculcation of doctrines false in fact, wrong in ethics, and absurd in the light of reason. Yet if all the rational parents could but combine to withdraw their chil-

dren simultaneously, as the law allows, from religious instruction in the public schools, their children would not be isolated ; while the others, no longer able to persecute the little heretic, might thus far be civilised to an extent to which religion and parental training have as yet failed to carry them.

Such an organisation of parents has lately been proposed, and no more important purpose could be set out. Once begun, the movement might successfully proceed to discountenance those endless weak conformities to superstition in the ceremonies of marriage and burial which give priest-hoods their most enduring source of strength. It is fair to ask of all public men who profess to stand for rational morality that they should set their faces against these things. An eminent living historian, Mr. Bryce, has well written that "our sloth or timidity, not seeing that whatever is false must also be bad, maintains in being what once was good long after it has become helpless and hopeless" ;\* and there must be thousands of readers who have approved of that saying. But what do they, or the leaders of enlightened opinion, *do* to act on the principle that whatever is false must also be bad? We have seen Mr. Huxley buried with religious rites, and an epitaph put on his grave expressing a theistic belief which he had repudiated. We see Mr.

\* 'Holy Roman Empire,' 8th ed., p. 357.

Morley extolled for attending the family prayers of the nobility — an institution in itself surely the most flimsy of all English forms of ceremonialism, with its daily half-hour of vain parade of equality before Omnipotence, in the face of the most rigid dominion and subjection and moral separation of castes all the rest of the day. And we cannot here say that it is economic pressure that is the proximate cause of the improper compromise made. The teachers, it would seem, have need to be taught, the custodians of moral principle to be supervised. Many of their lapses, it may be, are to be set down as concessions to the weak. But while concession to the weak is always a better thing than concession to Philistinism and wealth, it is none the less dangerous. We hear much of the harm of specially helping the weak to survive; but there is much more need to guard against the evil of letting their opinions rule. We want a new intellectual ethic at least as much as a new social ethic.

It is a comfort, in view of these things, to remember that the workers, with all their hardships, yet retain that single moral advantage which we before contemplated—the advantage of being free from most of the temptations to unworthy conformity which beset other ranks; and that they may thus do in the future for reasonable beliefs what they have done in the past for unreasonable. They have already, indeed, done much, far more than the other classes, proportion-



ately to their culture. But their rendering of the needed service to civilisation is visibly dependent on their own success in winning economic well-being, on which in turn so largely depends their capacity for intellectual interests. Here again the sociological lesson is clear and emphatic. And when it is thus seen how all social movement, be it progress or retrogression, is under the reign of law, and how a knowledge of the law may make possible the gradual reform of the conditions, surely the bands of progress, where bands there be, may take heart and hope. Surely the reasoned precepts of science may be to them what, as Milton sings, the Dorian music was of old to warriors who,

“instead of rage,  
Deliberate valor breathed, firm and unmoved  
With dread of death, to flight or foul retreat.”

Surely these too may contain a power

“to mitigate and swage  
With solemn touches, troubled thoughts, and chase  
Anguish, and doubt, and fear, and sorrow and pain.”

Whether or not the race is thus to learn to bring science and organisation to bear on its highest concerns, there ever remains for the true man the lot of the vanguard, with its old perils, its old pains, and its old inalienable reward of self respect. In some sense, indeed, it is almost vain to count that new truth can ever have a smooth course. When one verity has reached the length of organised support, another must begin

its way alone, if the great succession is to be maintained. For of most vital truths it is spiritually true, as was fabled of old of the mythic children predestined to found the realm of Rome, that they are nursed into strength by a wolf, the wolf of prejudice, of enmity, of persecution. And so for the new truth, to-day as of old, the precept to the bringer-forth must be that of the poet-preacher:

“Cast the bantling on the rocks,  
Suckle him with the she-wolf's teat;  
Wintered with the hawk and fox,  
Power and speed be hands and feet.”

For the sane reformer of to-day that is true which was said to the fanatic of old: “Paradise lies under the shadow of swords.” But that, of course, is not a saying for all men; and for the simple and sincere citizen, we repeat, there always remains the course of unpretending rectitude in the light of well-established knowledge, and under the protection and encouragement of the rational co-operation of his fellow-thinkers.

# THE PLEASURES OF MALIGNITY.

A LECTURE.

(1890.)

It is Professor Bain, I think, who has introduced into psychology\* the phrase "the Pleasures of Malevolence", which I doubt not has seemed to many of you a strange theme. The phrase is a perfectly serious one, and it points to a very important fact in human nature, though human nature would fain repudiate the implication. The eloquent Dr. Chalmers, as Professor Bain reminds us, sought to demonstrate† that malevolence has no pleasures; that he who hates, even if he exult in the injury to his enemy, must be conscious that all is not well within him; and that the tyrant who has the power to wreak to the uttermost his every caprice of passion does but vainly pursue a joy he cannot attain, and in reality lives a life of agony. The purpose of this thesis is the old one of showing that evil is somehow alien to the scheme of things; that we are "meant", somehow, to be good and kind; and that if we do ill by each other it must be our own fault, since our natures were "designed" for benevolence only. The field of theology is heaped with the wrecks of such arguments, which

\* See his 'The Emotions and the Will,' 3rd ed., p. 187.

† In his dissertation on 'The Inherent Misery of the Vicious Affections'.

vainly seek to reconcile contradictories, and gain their point by the device of the schoolboy who in an elaborate equation makes out, by the substitution of a *plus* for a *minus*,  $1=0$ . If there be design in Nature, we do what we were designed to do: if we can frustrate the design of Omnipotence, the datum of design is meaningless. We must just then turn and take the old path to truth—observation and reasoning.

Now, when we consider the matter strictly, there is seen to be a certain measure of practical truth in the declamation of Chalmers. It is true that the feeling of positive hatred can never long be a pleasurable one; that "all is not well within us" when we plan or long for vengeance; and that a condition of resentment is one of unrest and wearing strain. If, as Coleridge says, "to be wroth with one we love doth work like madness in the brain," no less true is it that all active hate soon verges towards physiological distress. But that is not at all a proof that malignant feeling is incompatible with pleasure. The strain is simply that inseparable from all intense feeling; and if it is ever great in the case of malevolent feeling it is because that feeling has itself been very strong. Have we not Shelley's sigh over the burden of "love's sad satiety," and Keats's picture of

"Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips  
Bidding adieu; and aching Pleasure nigh,  
Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips;"

and his avowal,

“Ay, in the very temple of Delight  
Veil'd melancholy has her sovran shrine”?

Nay, is it not found that the extremer forms of passion actually meet in unhinged organisms, so that Milton's figure of “lust hard by hate” becomes a physiological truth? These facts are plainly to be explained not by moral but by physiological laws, and the general truth they prove is, not that pain has been annexed to all malevolent feeling, but that it is correlative with all excessive emotion whatever, as is implied in the simple admission that any emotion may go to excess. So that up to a certain point malevolent emotion may be as pleasurable as any other. So clear is this that I even hesitate to say that that person is fortunate, if such a one exists, who has never known a malignant joy of any kind—that is, any joy connected with any one else's pain or discomfiture—for to be wholly devoid of the capacity for such joy would seem to imply, in the present stage of human evolution, some want of sensibility. True, the test of predominant goodness in character is just the degree of rapidity and certainty with which one passes from a malignant satisfaction to pity or a comprehensive sadness over all manifestations of evil; but that is another matter. It is still part of the paradox of our being that the destructive feeling is at times momentarily inevitable to the process of moral judgment.