

call the *vraie vérité*, he had absolutely no organ; therefore his reputation, brilliant as it is, is not secure. Rhetoric so good as his excites and gives pleasure; but by pleasure alone you cannot permanently bind men's spirits to you. Truth illuminates and gives joy, and it is by the bond of joy, not of pleasure, that men's spirits are indissolubly held. As Lord Macaulay's own generation dies out, as a new generation arrives, without those ideas and tendencies of its predecessor which Lord Macaulay so deeply shared and so happily satisfied, will he give the same pleasure? and, if he ceases to give this, has he enough of light in him to make him last? Pleasure the new generation will get from its own novel ideas and tendencies; but light is another and a rarer thing, and must be treasured wherever it can be found. Will Macaulay be saved, in the sweep and pressure of time, for his light's sake, as Johnson has already been saved by two generations, Joubert by one? I think it very doubtful. But for a spirit of any delicacy and dignity, what a fate, if he could foresee it! to be an oracle for one generation, and then of little or no account for ever. How far better, to pass with scant notice through one's own generation, but to be singled out and preserved by the very iconoclasts of the next, then in their turn by those of the next, and so, like the lamp of life itself, to be handed on from one generation to another in safety! This is Joubert's lot, and it is a very enviable one. The new men of the new generations, while they let the dust deepen on a thousand Laharpes, will say of him: "He lived



in the Philistine's day, in a place and time when almost every idea current in literature had the mark of Dagon upon it, and not the mark of the children of light. Nay, the children of light were as yet hardly so much as heard of: the Canaanite was then in the land. Still, there were even then a few, who, nourished on some secret tradition, or illumined, perhaps, by a divine inspiration, kept aloof from the reigning superstitions, never bowed the knee to the gods of Canaan; and one of these few was called *Joubert*."



## IX.

### SPINOZA AND THE BIBLE.

" By the sentence of the angels, by the decree of the saints, we anathematise, cut off, curse, and execrate Baruch Spinoza, in the presence of these sacred books with the six hundred and thirteen precepts which are written therein, with the anathema wherewith Joshua anathematised Jericho ; with the cursing wherewith Elisha cursed the children ; and with all the cursings which are written in the Book of the Law : cursed be he by day, and cursed by night ; cursed when he lieth down, and cursed when he riseth up ; cursed when he goeth out, and cursed when he cometh in ; the Lord pardon him never ; the wrath and fury of the Lord burn upon this man, and bring upon him all the curses which are written in the Book of the Law. The Lord blot out his name under heaven. The Lord set him apart for destruction from all the tribes of Israel, with all the curses of the firmament which are written in the Book of this Law. . . . There shall no man speak to him, no man write to him, no man show him any kindness, no man stay



under the same roof with him, no man come nigh him."

With these amenities, the current compliments of theological parting, the Jews of the Portuguese synagogue at Amsterdam took in 1656 (and not in 1660, as has till now been commonly supposed) their leave of their erring brother, Baruch or Benedict Spinoza. They remained children of Israel, and he became a child of modern Europe.

That was in 1656, and Spinoza died in 1677, at the early age of forty-four. Glory had not found him out. His short life—a life of unbroken diligence, kindness, and purity—was passed in seclusion. But in spite of that seclusion, in spite of the shortness of his career, in spite of the hostility of the dispensers of renown in the 18th century,—of Voltaire's disparagement and Bayle's detraction,—in spite of the repellent form which he has given to his principal work, in spite of the exterior semblance of a rigid dogmatism alien to the most essential tendencies of modern philosophy, in spite, finally, of the immense weight of disfavour cast upon him by the long-repeated charge of atheism, Spinoza's name has silently risen in importance, the man and his work have attracted a steadily increasing notice, and bid fair to become soon what they deserve to become,—in the history of modern philosophy the central point of interest. An avowed translation of one of his works,—his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*,—has at last made its appearance in English. It is the principal work which Spinoza published in his lifetime; his



book on ethics, the work on which his fame rests, is posthumous.

The English translator has not done his task well. Of the character of his version there can, I am afraid, be no doubt; one such passage as the following is decisive:—

“I confess that, *while with them* (the theologians) *I have never been able sufficiently to admire the unfathomed mysteries of Scripture, I have still found them giving utterance to nothing but Aristotelian and Platonic speculations*, artfully dressed up and cunningly accommodated to Holy Writ, lest the speakers should show themselves too plainly to belong to the sect of the Grecian heathens. *Nor was it enough for these men to discourse with the Greeks; they have further taken to raving with the Hebrew prophets.*”

This professes to be a translation of these words of Spinoza: “Fateor, eos nunquam satis mirari potuisse Scripturæ profundissima mysteria; attamen præter Aristotelicorum vel Platoniorum speculationes nihil docuisse video, atque his, ne gentiles sectari viderentur, Scripturam accommodaverunt. Non satis his fuit cum Graecis insanire, sed prophetas cum iisdem deliravisse voluerunt.” After one such specimen of a translator’s force, the experienced reader has a sort of instinct that he may as well close the book at once, with a smile or a sigh, according as he happens to be a follower of the weeping or of the laughing philosopher. If, in spite of this instinct, he persists in going on with the English version of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, he will find many more such



specimens. It is not, however, my intention to fill my space with these, or with strictures upon their author. I prefer to remark, that he renders a service to literary history by pointing out, in his preface, how "to Bayle may be traced the disfavour in which the name of Spinoza was so long held;" that, in his observations on the system of the Church of England, he shows a laudable freedom from the prejudices of ordinary English Liberals of that advanced school to which he clearly belongs; and lastly, that, though he manifests little familiarity with Latin, he seems to have considerable familiarity with philosophy, and to be well able to follow and comprehend speculative reasoning. Let me advise him to unite his forces with those of some one who has that accurate knowledge of Latin which he himself has not, and then, perhaps, of that union a really good translation of Spinoza will be the result. And, having given him this advice, let me again turn, for a little, to the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* itself.

This work, as I have already said, is a work on the interpretation of Scripture,—it treats of the Bible. What was it exactly which Spinoza thought about the Bible and its inspiration? That will be, at the present moment, the central point of interest for the English readers of his Treatise. Now, it is to be observed, that just on this very point the Treatise, interesting and remarkable as it is, will fail to satisfy the reader. It is important to seize this notion quite firmly, and not to quit hold of it while one is reading Spinoza's work. The scope of that work is this.



Spinoza sees that the life and practice of Christian nations professing the religion of the Bible, are not the due fruits of the religion of the Bible; he sees only hatred, bitterness, and strife, where he might have expected to see love, joy, and peace in believing; and he asks himself the reason of this. The reason is, he says, that these people misunderstand their Bible. Well, then, is his conclusion, I will write a *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. I will show these people, that, taking the Bible for granted, taking it to be all which it asserts itself to be, taking it to have all the authority which it claims, it is not what they imagine it to be, it does not say what they imagine it to say. I will show them what it really does say, and I will show them that they will do well to accept this real teaching of the Bible, instead of the phantom with which they have so long been cheated. I will show their governments that they will do well to remodel the national churches, to make of them institutions informed with the spirit of the true Bible, instead of institutions informed with the spirit of this false phantom.

The comments of men, Spinoza said, had been foisted into the Christian religion; the pure teaching of God had been lost sight of. He determined, therefore, to go again to the Bible, to read it over and over with a perfectly unprejudiced mind, and to accept nothing as its teaching which it did not clearly teach. He began by constructing a method, or set of conditions indispensable for the adequate interpretation of Scripture. These conditions are such, he



points out, that a perfectly adequate interpretation of Scripture is now impossible. For example, to understand any prophet thoroughly, we ought to know the life, character, and pursuits of that prophet, under what circumstances his book was composed, and in what state and through what hands it has come down to us; and, in general, most of this we cannot now know. Still, the main sense of the Books of Scripture may be clearly seized by us. Himself a Jew with all the learning of his nation, and a man of the highest natural powers, Spinoza had in the difficult task of seizing this sense every aid which special knowledge or pre-eminent faculties could supply.

In what then, he asks, does Scripture, interpreted by its own aid, and not by the aid of Rabbinical traditions or Greek philosophy, allege its own divinity to consist? In a revelation given by God to the prophets. Now all knowledge is a divine revelation; but prophecy, as represented in Scripture, is one of which the laws of human nature, considered in themselves alone, cannot be the cause. Therefore nothing must be asserted about it, except what is clearly declared by the prophets themselves; for they are our only source of knowledge on a matter which does not fall within the scope of our ordinary knowing faculties. But ignorant people, not knowing the Hebrew genius and phraseology, and not attending to the circumstances of the speaker, often imagine the prophets to assert things which they do not.

The prophets clearly declare themselves to have received the revelation of God through the means of



words and images ;—not, as Christ, through immediate communication of the mind with the mind of God. Therefore the prophets excelled other men by the power and vividness of their representing and imagining faculty, not by the perfection of their mind. This is why they perceived almost everything through figures, and express themselves so variously, and so improperly, concerning the nature of God. Moses imagined that God could be seen, and attributed to him the passions of anger and jealousy ; Micaiah imagined him sitting on a throne, with the host of heaven on his right and left hand ; Daniel as an old man, with a white garment and white hair ; Ezekiel as a fire ; the disciples of Christ thought they saw the Spirit of God in the form of a dove ; the apostles in the form of fiery tongues.

Whence, then, could the prophets be certain of the truth of a revelation which they received through the imagination, and not by a mental process ?—for only an idea can carry the sense of its own certainty along with it, not an imagination. To make them certain of the truth of what was revealed to them, a reasoning process came in ; they had to rely on the testimony of a sign ; and (above all) on the testimony of their own conscience, that they were good men, and spoke for God's sake. Either testimony was incomplete without the other. Even the good prophet needed for his message the confirmation of a sign ; but the bad prophet, the utterer of an immoral doctrine, had no certainty for his doctrine, no truth in it, even though he confirmed it by a sign. The



testimony of a good conscience was, therefore, the prophet's grand source of certitude. Even this, however, was only a moral certitude, not a mathematical ; for no man can be perfectly sure of his own goodness.

The power of imagining, the power of feeling what goodness is, and the habit of practising goodness, were therefore the sole essential qualifications of a true prophet. But for the purpose of the message, the revelation, which God designed him to convey, these qualifications were enough. The sum and substance of this revelation was simply : *Believe in God, and lead a good life.* To be the organ of this revelation, did not make a man more learned ; it left his scientific knowledge as it found it. This explains the contradictory and speculatively false opinions about God, and the laws of nature, which the patriarchs, the prophets, the apostles entertained. Abraham and the patriarchs knew God only as *El Sadai*, the power which gives to every man that which suffices him ; Moses knew him as *Jehovah*, a self-existent being, but imagined him with the passions of a man. Samuel imagined that God could not repent of his sentences ; Jeremiah, that he could. Joshua, on a day of great victory, the ground being white with hail, seeing the daylight last longer than usual, and imaginatively seizing this as a special sign of the help divinely promised to him, declared that the sun was standing still. To be obeyers of God themselves, and inspired leaders of others to obedience and good life, did not make Abraham and Moses metaphysicians, or Joshua a natural philosopher. His revelation



no more changed the speculative opinions of each prophet, than it changed his temperament or style. The wrathful Elisha required the natural sedative of music, before he could be the messenger of good fortune to Jehoram. The high-bred Isaiah and Nahum have the style proper to their condition, and the rustic Ezekiel and Amos the style proper to theirs. We are not therefore bound to pay heed to the speculative opinions of this or that prophet, for in uttering these he spoke as a mere man: only in exhorting his hearers to obey God and lead a good life was he the organ of a divine revelation.

To know and love God is the highest blessedness of man, and of all men alike; to this all mankind are called, and not any one nation in particular. The divine law, properly so named, is the method of life for attaining this height of human blessedness: this law is universal, written in the heart, and one for all mankind. Human law is the method of life for attaining and preserving temporal security and prosperity: this law is dictated by a lawgiver, and every nation has its own. In the case of the Jews, this law was dictated, by revelation, through the prophets; its fundamental precept was to obey God and to keep his commandments, and it is therefore, in a secondary sense, called divine; but it was, nevertheless, framed in respect of temporal things only. Even the truly moral and divine precept of this law, to practise for God's sake justice and mercy towards one's neighbour, meant for the Hebrew of the Old Testament his Hebrew neighbour only, and had respect to the



concord and stability of the Hebrew commonwealth. The Jews were to obey God and to keep his commandments, that they might continue long in the land given to them, and that it might be well with them there. Their election was a temporal one, and lasted only so long as their State. It is now over; and the only election the Jews now have is that of the *pious*, the *remnant* which takes place, and has always taken place, in every other nation also. Scripture itself teaches that there is a universal divine law, that this is common to all nations alike, and is the law which truly confers eternal blessedness. Solomon, the wisest of the Jews, knew this law, as the few wisest men in all nations have ever known it; but for the mass of the Jews, as for the mass of mankind everywhere, this law was hidden, and they had no notion of its moral action, its *vera vita* which conducts to eternal blessedness, except so far as this action was enjoined upon them by the prescriptions of their temporal law. When the ruin of their State brought with it the ruin of their temporal law, they would have lost altogether their only clue to eternal blessedness.

Christ came when that fabric of the Jewish State, for the sake of which the Jewish law existed, was about to fall; and he proclaimed the universal divine law. A certain moral action is prescribed by this law, as a certain moral action was prescribed by the Jewish law: but he who truly conceives the universal divine law conceives God's decrees adequately as eternal truths, and for him moral action has liberty and self-knowledge; while the prophets of the Jewish



law inadequately conceived God's decrees as mere rules and commands, and for them moral action had no liberty and no self-knowledge. Christ, who beheld the decrees of God as God himself beholds them,—as eternal truths,—proclaimed the love of God and the love of our neighbour as *commands*, only because of the ignorance of the multitude: to those to whom it was “given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God,” he announced them, as he himself perceived them, as eternal truths. And the apostles, like Christ, spoke to many of their hearers “as unto carnal not spiritual;” presented to them, that is, the love of God and their neighbour as a divine command authenticated by the life and death of Christ, not as an eternal idea of reason carrying its own warrant along with it. The presentation of it as this latter their hearers “were not able to bear.” The apostles, moreover, though they preached and confirmed their doctrine by signs as prophets, wrote their Epistles, not as prophets, but as doctors and reasoners. The essentials of their doctrine, indeed, they took not from reason, but, like the prophets, from fact and revelation; they preached belief in God and goodness of life as a catholic religion existing by virtue of the passion of Christ, as the prophets had preached belief in God and goodness of life as a national religion existing by virtue of the Mosaic covenant: but while the prophets announced their message in a form purely dogmatical, the apostles developed theirs with the forms of reasoning and argumentation, according to each apostle's ability and way of thinking, and as they might best commend



their message to their hearers; and for their reasonings they themselves claim no divine authority, submitting them to the judgment of their hearers. Thus each apostle built essential religion on a non-essential foundation of his own, and, as St. Paul says, avoided building on the foundations of another apostle, which might be quite different from his own. Hence the discrepancies between the doctrine of one apostle and another,—between that of St. Paul, for example, and that of St. James; but these discrepancies are in the non-essentials not given to them by revelation, and not in essentials. Human churches, seizing these discrepant non-essentials as essentials, one maintaining one of them, another another, have filled the world with unprofitable disputes, have “turned the Church into an academy, and religion into a science, or rather a wrangling,” and have fallen into endless schism.

What, then, are the essentials of religion according both to the Old and to the New Testament? Very few and very simple. The precept to love God and our neighbour. The precepts of the first chapter of Isaiah: “Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment; relieve the oppressed; judge the fatherless; plead for the widow.” The precepts of the Sermon on the Mount, which add to the foregoing the injunction that we should cease to do evil and learn to do well, not to our brethren and fellow-citizens only, but to all mankind. It is by following these precepts that belief in God is to be shown: if we believe in him, we shall keep his com-



mandment; and this is his commandment, that we love one another. It is because it contains these precepts that the Bible is properly called the Word of God, in spite of its containing much that is mere history, and, like all history, sometimes true, sometimes false; in spite of its containing much that is mere reasoning, and, like all reasoning, sometimes sound, sometimes hollow. These precepts are also the precepts of the universal divine law written in our hearts; and it is only by this that the divinity of Scripture is established;—by its containing, namely, precepts identical with those of this inly-written and self-proving law. This law was in the world, as St. John says, before the doctrine of Moses or the doctrine of Christ. And what need was there, then, for these doctrines? Because the world at large “knew not” this original divine law, in which precepts are ideas, and the belief in God the knowledge and contemplation of him. Reason gives us this law, reason tells us that it leads to eternal blessedness, and that those who follow it have no need of any other. But reason could not have told us that the moral action of the universal divine law,—followed not from a sense of its intrinsic goodness, truth, and necessity, but simply in proof of obedience (for both the Old and New Testament are but one long discipline of obedience), simply because it is so commanded by Moses in virtue of the covenant, simply because it is so commanded by Christ in virtue of his life and passion,—can lead to eternal blessedness, which means, for reason, eternal knowledge. Reason could not have told us this, and



this is what the Bible tells us. This is that "thing which had been kept secret since the foundation of the world." It is thus that by means of the foolishness of the world God confounds the wise, and with things that are not brings to nought things that are. Of the truth of the promise thus made to obedience without knowledge, we can have no mathematical certainty; for we can have a mathematical certainty only of things deduced by reason from elements which she in herself possesses. But we can have a moral certainty of it; a certainty such as the prophets had themselves, arising out of the goodness and pureness of those to whom this revelation has been made, and rendered possible for us by its contradicting no principles of reason. It is a great comfort to believe it; because "as it is only the very small minority who can pursue a virtuous life by the sole guidance of reason, we should, unless we had this testimony of Scripture, be in doubt respecting the salvation of nearly the whole human race."

It follows from this that philosophy has her own independent sphere, and theology hers, and that neither has the right to invade and try to subdue the other. Theology demands perfect obedience, philosophy perfect knowledge: the obedience demanded by theology and the knowledge demanded by philosophy are alike saving. As speculative opinions about God, theology requires only such as are indispensable to the reality of this obedience; the belief that God is, that he is a rewarder of them that seek him, and that the proof of seeking him is a good life. These



are the fundamentals of faith, and they are so clear and simple that none of the inaccuracies provable in the Bible narrative the least affect them, and they have indubitably come to us uncorrupted. He who holds them may make, as the patriarchs and prophets did, other speculations about God most erroneous, and yet their faith is complete and saving. Nay, beyond these fundamentals, speculative opinions are pious or impious, not as they are true or false, but as they confirm or shake the believer in the practice of obedience. The truest speculative opinion about the nature of God is impious if it makes its holder rebellious; the falsest speculative opinion is pious if it makes him obedient. Governments should never render themselves the tools of ecclesiastical ambition by promulgating as fundamentals of the national Church's faith more than these, and should concede the fullest liberty of speculation.

But the multitude, which respects only what astonishes, terrifies, and overwhelms it, by no means takes this simple view of its own religion. To the multitude, religion seems imposing only when it is subversive of reason, confirmed by miracles, conveyed in documents materially sacred and infallible, and dooming to damnation all without its pale. But this religion of the multitude is not the religion which a true interpretation of Scripture finds in Scripture. Reason tells us that a miracle,—understanding by a miracle a breach of the laws of nature,—is impossible, and that to think it possible is to dishonour God; for the laws of nature are the laws of God, and to say



that God violates the laws of nature is to say that he violates his own nature. Reason sees, too, that miracles can never attain their professed object,—that of bringing us to a higher knowledge of God; since our knowledge of God is raised only by perfecting and clearing our conceptions, and the alleged design of miracles is to baffle them. But neither does Scripture anywhere assert, as a general truth, that miracles are possible. Indeed, it asserts the contrary; for Jeremiah declares that Nature follows an invariable order. Scripture, however, like Nature herself, does not lay down speculative propositions (*Scriptura definitiones non tradit, ut nec etiam natura*). It relates matters in such an order and with such phraseology as a speaker (often not perfectly instructed himself) who wanted to impress his hearers with a lively sense of God's greatness and goodness would naturally employ; as Moses, for instance, relates to the Israelites the passage of the Red Sea without any mention of the east wind which attended it, and which is brought accidentally to our knowledge in another place. So that to know exactly what Scripture means in the relation of each seeming miracle, we ought to know (besides the tropes and phrases of the Hebrew language) the circumstances, and also,—since every one is swayed in his manner of presenting facts by his own preconceived opinions, and we have seen what those of the prophets were,—the preconceived opinions of each speaker. But this mode of interpreting Scripture is fatal to the vulgar notion of its verbal inspiration, of a sanctity and absolute truth



in all the words and sentences of which it is composed. This vulgar notion is, indeed, a palpable error. It is demonstrable from the internal testimony of the Scriptures themselves, that the books from the first of the Pentateuch to the last of Kings were put together, after the first destruction of Jerusalem, by a compiler (probably Ezra) who designed to relate the history of the Jewish people from its origin to that destruction; it is demonstrable, moreover, that the compiler did not put his last hand to the work, but left it with its extracts from various and conflicting sources sometimes unreconciled, left it with errors of text and unsettled readings. The prophetic books are mere fragments of the prophets, collected by the Rabbins where they could find them, and inserted in the Canon according to their discretion. They, at first, proposed to admit neither the Book of Proverbs nor the Book of Ecclesiastes into the Canon, and only admitted them because there were found in them passages which commended the law of Moses. Ezekiel also they had determined to exclude; but one of their number remodelled him, so as to procure his admission. The Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, and Daniel are the work of a single author, and were not written till after Judas Maccabeus had restored the worship of the Temple. The Book of Psalms was collected and arranged at the same time. Before this time, there was no Canon of the sacred writings, and the great synagogue, by which the Canon was fixed, was first convened after the Macedonian conquest of Asia. Of that synagogue none of the pro-



phets were members ; the learned men who composed it were guided by their own fallible judgment. In like manner the uninspired judgment of human councils determined the Canon of the New Testament.

Such, reduced to the briefest and plainest terms possible, stripped of the developments and proofs with which he delivers it, and divested of the metaphysical language in which much of it is clothed by him, is the doctrine of Spinoza's treatise on the interpretation of Scripture. By the whole scope and drift of its argument, by the spirit in which the subject is throughout treated, his work undeniably is most interesting and stimulating to the general culture of Europe. There are errors and contradictions in Scripture ; and the question which the general culture of Europe, well aware of this, asks with real interest is : What then ? What follows from all this ? What change is it, if true, to produce in the relations of mankind to the Christian religion ? If the old theory of Scripture inspiration is to be abandoned, what place is the Bible henceforth to hold among books ? What is the new Christianity to be like ? How are governments to deal with National Churches founded to maintain a very different conception of Christianity ? Spinoza addresses himself to these questions. All secondary points of criticism he touches with the utmost possible brevity. He points out that Moses could never have written : "And the Canaanite was then in the land," because the Canaanite was in the land still at the death of Moses. He points out that



Moses could never have written : "There arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses." He points out how such a passage as, "These are the kings that reigned in Edom *before there reigned any king over the children of Israel*," clearly indicates an author writing not before the times of the Kings. He points out how the account of Og's iron bedstead : "Only Og the king of Bashan remained of the remnant of giants ; behold, his bedstead was a bedstead of iron ; is it not in Rabbath of the children of Ammon ?"—probably indicates an author writing after David had taken Rabbath, and found there "abundance of spoil," amongst it this iron bedstead, the gigantic relic of another age. He points out how the language of this passage, and of such a passage as that in the Book of Samuel : "Beforetime in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, thus he spake : Come and let us go to the seer ; for he that is now called prophet was aforetime called seer"—is certainly the language of a writer describing the events of a long-past age, and not the language of a contemporary. But he devotes to all this no more space than is absolutely necessary. He apologises for delaying over such matters so long : *non est cur circa hæc diu detinear—nolo tædiosâ lectione lectorem detinere*. For him the interesting question is, not whether the fanatical devotee of the letter is to continue, for a longer or for a shorter time, to believe that Moses sate in the land of Moab writing the description of his own death, but what he is to believe when he does not believe this. Is he to take for the guidance



of his life a great gloss put upon the Bible by theologians, who, "not content with going mad themselves with Plato and Aristotle, want to make Christ and the prophets go mad with them too,"—or the Bible itself? Is he to be presented by his national church with metaphysical formularies for his creed, or with the real fundamentals of Christianity? If with the former, religion will never produce its due fruits. A few elect will still be saved; but the vast majority of mankind will remain without grace and without good works, hateful and hating one another. Therefore he calls urgently upon governments to make the national church what it should be. This is the conclusion of the whole matter for him; a fervent appeal to the State, to save us from the untoward generation of metaphysical Article-makers. And therefore, anticipating Mr. Gladstone, he called his book *The Church in its Relations with the State*.

Such is really the scope of Spinoza's work. He pursues a great object, and pursues it with signal ability. But it is important to observe that he nowhere distinctly gives his own opinion about the Bible's fundamental character. He takes the Bible as it stands, as he might take the phenomena of nature, and he discusses it as he finds it. Revelation differs from natural knowledge, he says, not by being more divine or more certain than natural knowledge, but by being conveyed in a different way; it differs from it because it is a knowledge "of which the laws of human nature considered in themselves alone cannot be the cause." What is really its cause, he says, we



need not here inquire (*verum nec nobis jam opus est propheticae cognitionis causam scire*), for we take Scripture, which contains this revelation, as it stands, and do not ask how it arose (*documentorum causas nihil curamus*).

Proceeding on this principle, Spinoza leaves the attentive reader somewhat baffled and disappointed, clear, as is his way of treating his subject, and remarkable as are the conclusions with which he presents us. He starts, we feel, from what is to him a hypothesis, and we want to know what he really thinks about this hypothesis. His greatest novelties are all within limits fixed for him by this hypothesis. He says that the voice which called Samuel was an imaginary voice; he says that the waters of the Red Sea retreated before a strong wind; he says that the Shunammite's son was revived by the natural heat of Elisha's body; he says that the rainbow which was made a sign to Noah appeared in the ordinary course of nature. Scripture itself, rightly interpreted, says, he affirms, all this. But he asserts that the divine voice which uttered the commandments on Mount Sinai was a real voice, *vera vox*. He says, indeed, that this voice could not really give to the Israelites that proof which they imagined it gave to them of the existence of God, and that God on Sinai was dealing with the Israelites only according to their imperfect knowledge. Still he asserts the divine voice to have been a real one; and for this reason, that we do violence to Scripture if we do not admit it to have been a real one (*nisi Scripturae vim inferre velimus, omnino concedendum est, Israëlitas veram vocem audivisse*).



The attentive reader wants to know what Spinoza himself thought about this *vera vox* and its possibility; he is much more interested in knowing this than in knowing what Spinoza considered Scripture to affirm about the matter.

The feeling of perplexity thus caused is not diminished by the language of the chapter on miracles. In this chapter Spinoza broadly affirms a miracle to be an impossibility. But he himself contrasts the method of demonstration *à priori*, by which he claims to have established this proposition, with the method which he has pursued in treating of prophetic revelation. "This revelation," he says, "is a matter out of human reach, and therefore I was bound to take it as I found it." *Monere volo, me aliâ prorsus methodo circa miracula processisse, quam circa prophetiam . . . quod etiam consulto feci, quia de prophetiâ, quandoquidem ipsa captum humanum superat et quæstio mere theologica est, nihil affirmare, neque etiam scire poteram in quo ipsa potissimum constiterit, nisi ex fundamentis revelatis.* The reader feels that Spinoza, proceeding on a hypothesis, has presented him with the assertion of a miracle, and afterwards, proceeding *à priori*, has presented him with the assertion that a miracle is impossible. He feels that Spinoza does not adequately reconcile these two assertions by declaring that any event really miraculous, if found recorded in Scripture, must be "a spurious addition made to Scripture by sacrilegious men." Is, then, he asks the *vera vox* of Mount Sinai in Spinoza's opinion a spurious addition made to Scripture by sacrilegious men; or, if not, how is it not miraculous?



Spinoza, in his own mind, regarded the Bible as a vast collection of miscellaneous documents, many of them quite disparate and not at all to be harmonised with others; documents of unequal value and of varying applicability, some of them conveying ideas salutary for one time, others for another. But in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* he by no means always deals in this free spirit with the Bible. Sometimes he chooses to deal with it in the spirit of the veriest worshipper of the letter; sometimes he chooses to treat the Bible as if all its parts were (so to speak) equipollent; to snatch an isolated text which suits his purpose, without caring whether it is annulled by the context, by the general drift of Scripture, or by other passages of more weight and authority. The great critic thus becomes voluntarily as uncritical as Exeter Hall. The Epicurean Solomon, whose *Ecclesiastes* the Hebrew doctors, even after they had received it into the canon, forbade the young and weak-minded among their community to read, Spinoza quotes as of the same authority with the severe Moses; he uses promiscuously, as documents of identical force, without discriminating between their essentially different character, the softened cosmopolitan teaching of the prophets of the captivity and the rigid national teaching of the instructors of Israel's youth. He is capable of extracting, from a chance expression of Jeremiah, the assertion of a speculative idea which Jeremiah certainly never entertained, and from which he would have recoiled in dismay,—the idea, namely, that miracles are impos-



sible; just as the ordinary Englishman can extract from God's words to Noah, *Be fruitful and multiply*, an exhortation to himself to have a large family. Spinoza, I repeat, knew perfectly well what this verbal mode of dealing with the Bible was worth: but he sometimes uses it because of the hypothesis from which he set out; because of his having agreed "to take Scripture as it stands, and not to ask how it arose."

No doubt the sagacity of Spinoza's rules for Biblical interpretation, the power of his analysis of the contents of the Bible, the interest of his reflections on Jewish history, are, in spite of this, very great, and have an absolute worth of their own, independent of the silence or ambiguity of their author upon a point of cardinal importance. Few candid people will read his rules of interpretation without exclaiming that they are the very dictates of good sense, that they have always believed in them; and without adding, after a moment's reflection, that they have passed their lives in violating them. And what can be more interesting, than to find that perhaps the main cause of the decay of the Jewish polity was one of which from our English Bible, which entirely mistranslates the 26th verse of the 20th chapter of Ezekiel, we hear nothing,—the perpetual reproach of impurity and rejection cast upon the mass of the Hebrew nation by the exclusive priesthood of the tribe of Levi? What can be more suggestive, after Mr. Mill and Dr. Stanley have been telling us how great an element of strength to the Hebrew nation



was the institution of prophets, than to hear from the ablest of Hebrews how this institution seems to him to have been to his nation one of her main elements of weakness? No intelligent man can read the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* without being profoundly instructed by it: but neither can he read it without feeling that, as a speculative work, it is, to use a French military expression, *in the air*; that, in a certain sense, it is in want of a base and in want of supports; that this base and these supports are, at any rate, not to be found in the work itself, and, if they exist, must be sought for in other works of the author.

The genuine speculative opinions of Spinoza, which the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* but imperfectly reveals, may in his Ethics and in his Letters be found set forth clearly. It is, however, the business of criticism to deal with every independent work as with an independent whole, and, instead of establishing between the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* and the Ethics of Spinoza a relation which Spinoza himself has not established,—to seize, in dealing with the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, the important fact that this work has its source, not in the axioms and definition of the Ethics, but in a hypothesis. The Ethics are not yet translated into English, and I have not here to speak of them. Then will be the right time for criticism to try and seize the special character and tendencies of that remarkable work, when it is dealing with it directly. The criticism of the Ethics is far too serious a task to be undertaken incidentally, and merely as a supplement to the criticism of the



*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. Nevertheless, on certain governing ideas of Spinoza, which receive their systematic expression, indeed, in the *Ethics*, and on which the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* is not formally based, but which are yet never absent from Spinoza's mind in the composition of any work, which breathe through all his works, and fill them with a peculiar effect and power, I have a word or two to say.

A philosopher's real power over mankind resides not in his metaphysical formulas, but in the spirit and tendencies which have led him to adopt those formulas. Spinoza's critic, therefore, has rather to bring to light that spirit and those tendencies of his author, than to exhibit his metaphysical formulas. Propositions about substance pass by mankind at large like the idle wind, which mankind at large regards not; it will not even listen to a word about these propositions, unless it first learns what their author was driving at with them, and finds that this object of his is one with which it sympathises, one, at any rate, which commands its attention. And mankind is so far right that this object of the author is really, as has been said, that which is most important, that which sets all his work in motion, that which is the secret of his attraction for other minds, which, by different ways, pursue the same object.

Mr. Maurice, seeking for the cause of Goethe's great admiration for Spinoza, thinks that he finds it in Spinoza's Hebrew genius. "He spoke of God," says Mr. Maurice, "as an actual being, to those who had fancied him a name in a book. The child of the



circumcision had a message for Lessing and Goethe which the pagan schools of philosophy could not bring." This seems to me, I confess, fanciful. An intensity and impressiveness, which came to him from his Hebrew nature, Spinoza no doubt has ; but the two things which are most remarkable about him, and by which, as I think, he chiefly impressed Goethe, seem to me not to come to him from his Hebrew nature at all,—I mean his denial of final causes, and his stoicism, a stoicism not passive, but active. For a mind like Goethe's,—a mind profoundly impartial and passionately aspiring after the science, not of men only, but of universal nature,—the popular philosophy which explains all things by reference to man, and regards universal nature as existing for the sake of man, and even of certain classes of men, was utterly repulsive. Unchecked, this philosophy would gladly maintain that the donkey exists in order that the invalid Christian may have donkey's milk before breakfast ; and such views of nature as this were exactly what Goethe's whole soul abhorred. Creation, he thought, should be made of sterner stuff ; he desired to rest the donkey's existence on larger grounds. More than any philosopher who has ever lived, Spinoza satisfied him here. The full exposition of the counter-doctrine to the popular doctrine of final causes is to be found in the *Ethics* ; but this denial of final causes was so essential an element of all Spinoza's thinking that we shall, as has been said already, find it in the work with which we are here concerned, the *Tractatus*



*Theologico-Politicus*, and, indeed, permeating that work and all his works. From the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* one may take as good a general statement of this denial as any which is to be found in the *Ethics* :—

“Deus naturam dirigit, prout ejus leges universales, non autem prout humanæ naturæ particulares leges exigunt, adeoque Deus non solius humani generis, sed totius naturæ rationem habet. (*God directs nature, according as the universal laws of nature, but not according as the particular laws of human nature require ; and so God has regard, not of the human race only, but of entire nature.*)”

And, as a pendant to this denial by Spinoza of final causes, comes his stoicism :—

“Non studemus, ut natura nobis, sed contra ut nos naturæ pareamus. (*Our desire is not that nature may obey us, but, on the contrary, that we may obey nature.*)”

Here is the second source of his attractiveness for Goethe ; and Goethe is but the eminent representative of a whole order of minds whose admiration has made Spinoza's fame. Spinoza first impresses Goethe and any man like Goethe, and then he composes him ; first he fills and satisfies his imagination by the width and grandeur of his view of nature, and then he fortifies and stills his mobile, straining, passionate, poetic temperament by the moral lesson he draws from his view of nature. And a moral lesson not of mere resigned acquiescence, not of melancholy quietism, but of joyful activity within the limits of man's true sphere :—

“Ipsa hominis essentia est conatus quo unusquis



que suum esse conservare conatur. . . . Virtus hominis est ipsa hominis essentia, quatenus a solo conatu suum esse conservandi definitur. . . . Felicitas in eo consistit quod homo suum esse conservare potest. . . . Lætitia est hominis transitio ad majorem perfectionem . . . Tristitia est hominis transitio ad minorem perfectionem. (*Man's very essence is the effort wherewith each man strives to maintain his own being. . . . Man's virtue is this very essence, so far as it is defined by this single effort to maintain his own being. . . . Happiness consists in a man's being able to maintain his own being. . . . Joy is man's passage to a greater perfection. . . . Sorrow is man's passage to a lesser perfection.*)"

It seems to me that by neither of these, his grand characteristic doctrines, is Spinoza truly Hebrew or truly Christian. His denial of final causes is essentially alien to the spirit of the Old Testament, and his cheerful and self-sufficing stoicism is essentially alien to the spirit of the New. The doctrine that "God directs nature, not according as the particular laws of human nature, but according as the universal laws of nature require," is at utter variance with that Hebrew mode of representing God's dealings, which makes the locusts visit Egypt to punish Pharaoh's hardness of heart, and the falling dew avert itself from the fleece of Gideon. The doctrine that "all sorrow is a passage to a lesser perfection" is at utter variance with the Christian recognition of the blessedness of sorrow, working "repentance to salvation not to be repented of;" of sorrow, which, in Dante's words, "remarries us to God."



Spinoza's repeated and earnest assertions that the love of God is man's *summum bonum* do not remove the fundamental diversity between his doctrine and the Hebrew and Christian doctrines. By the love of God he does not mean the same thing which the Hebrew and Christian religions mean by the love of God. He makes the love of God to consist in the knowledge of God; and, as we know God only through his manifestation of himself in the laws of all nature, it is by knowing these laws that we love God, and the more we know them the more we love him. This may be true, but this is not what the Christian means by the love of God. Spinoza's ideal is the intellectual life; the Christian's ideal is the religious life. Between the two conditions there is all the difference which there is between the being in love, and the following, with delighted comprehension, a reasoning of Plato. For Spinoza, undoubtedly, the crown of the intellectual life is a transport, as for the saint the crown of the religious life is a transport; but the two transports are not the same.

This is true; yet it is true, also, that by thus crowning the intellectual life with a sacred transport, by thus retaining in philosophy, amid the discontented murmurs of all the army of atheism, the name of God, Spinoza maintains a profound affinity with that which is truest in religion, and inspires an indestructible interest. One of his admirers, M. Van Vloten, has recently published at Amsterdam a supplementary volume to Spinoza's works, containing the interesting document of Spinoza's sentence of excommunication,



from which I have already quoted, and containing, besides, several lately found works alleged to be Spinoza's, which seem to me to be of doubtful authenticity, and, even if authentic, of no great importance. M. Van Vloten (who, let me be permitted to say in passing, writes a Latin which would make one think that the art of writing Latin must be now a lost art in the country of Lipsius) is very anxious that Spinoza's unscientific retention of the name of God should not afflict his readers with any doubts as to his perfect scientific orthodoxy:—

“It is a great mistake,” he cries, “to disparage Spinoza as merely one of the dogmatists before Kant. By keeping the name of God, while he did away with his person and character, he has done himself an injustice. Those who look to the bottom of things will see, that, long ago as he lived, he had even then reached the point to which the post-Hegelian philosophy and the study of natural science has only just brought our own times. Leibnitz expressed his apprehension lest those who did away with final causes should do away with God at the same time. But it is in his having done away with final causes, *and with God along with them*, that Spinoza's true merit consists.”

Now it must be remarked that to use Spinoza's denial of final causes in order to identify him with the Coryphæi of atheism, is to make a false use of Spinoza's denial of final causes, just as to use his assertion of the all-importance of loving God to identify him with the saints would be to make a false use of



his assertion of the all-importance of loving God. He is no more to be identified with the post-Hegelian philosophers than he is to be identified with St. Augustine. Unction, indeed, Spinoza's writings have not; that name does not precisely fit any quality which they exhibit. And yet, so all-important in the sphere of religious thought is the power of edification, that in this sphere a great fame like Spinoza's can never be founded without it. A court of literature can never be very severe to Voltaire: with that inimitable wit and clear sense of his, he cannot write a page in which the fullest head may not find something suggestive: still, because, handling religious ideas, he yet, with all his wit and clear sense, handles them wholly without the power of edification, his fame as a great man is equivocal. Strauss has treated the question of Scripture miracles with an acuteness and fulness which even to the most informed minds is instructive; but because he treats it almost wholly without the power of edification, his fame as a serious thinker is equivocal. But in Spinoza there is not a trace either of Voltaire's passion for mockery or of Strauss's passion for demolition. His whole soul was filled with desire of the love and knowledge of God, and of that only. Philosophy always proclaims herself on the way to the *summum bonum*; but too often on the road she seems to forget her destination, and suffers her hearers to forget it also. Spinoza never forgets his destination: "The love of God is man's highest happiness and blessedness, and the final end and aim of all human actions;"—"The supreme re-



ward for keeping God's Word is that Word itself—namely, to know him and with free will and pure and constant heart love him :” these sentences are the keynote to all he produced, and were the inspiration of all his labours. This is why he turns so sternly upon the worshippers of the letter,—the editors of the *Masora*, the editor of the *Record*,—because their doctrine imperils our love and knowledge of God. “What!” he cries, “our knowledge of God to depend upon these perishable things, which Moses can dash to the ground and break to pieces like the first tables of stone, or of which the originals can be lost like the original book of the Covenant, like the original book of the Law of God, like the book of the Wars of God! . . . which can come to us confused, imperfect, mis-written by copyists, tampered with by doctors! And you accuse others of impiety! It is you who are impious, to believe that God would commit the treasure of the true record of himself to any substance less enduring than the heart!”

And Spinoza's life was not unworthy of this elevated strain. A philosopher who professed that knowledge was its own reward, a devotee who professed that the love of God was its own reward, this philosopher and this devotee believed in what he said. Spinoza led a life the most spotless, perhaps, to be found among the lives of philosophers; he lived simple, studious, even-tempered, kind; declining honours, declining riches, declining notoriety. He was poor, and his admirer Simon de Vries sent him two thousand florins;—he



refused them. The same friend left him his fortune ; —he returned it to the heir. He was asked to dedicate one of his works to the magnificent patron of letters in his century, Louis the Fourteenth ;—he declined. His great work, his Ethics, published after his death, he gave injunctions to his friends to publish anonymously, for fear he should give his name to a school. Truth, he thought, should bear no man's name. And finally, —“Unless,” he said, “I had known that my writings would in the end advance the cause of true religion, I would have suppressed them,—*tacuissem*.” It was in this spirit that he lived ; and this spirit gives to all he writes not exactly unction, —I have already said so,—but a kind of sacred solemnity. Not of the same order as the saints, he yet follows the same service : *Doubtless thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not.*

Therefore he has been, in a certain sphere, edifying, and has inspired in many powerful minds an interest and an admiration such as no other philosopher has inspired since Plato. The lonely precursor of German philosophy, he still shines when the light of his successors is fading away ; they had celebrity, Spinoza has fame. Not because his peculiar system of philosophy has had more adherents than theirs ; on the contrary, it has had fewer. But schools of philosophy arise and fall ; their bands of adherents inevitably dwindle ; no master can long persuade a large body of disciples that they give to themselves just the same account of the world as he does ; it is only the very



young and the very enthusiastic who can think themselves sure that they possess the whole mind of Plato, or Spinoza, or Hegel, at all. The very mature and the very sober can even hardly believe that these philosophers possessed it themselves enough to put it all into their works, and to let us know entirely how the world seemed to them. What a remarkable philosopher really does for human thought, is to throw into circulation a certain number of new and striking ideas and expressions, and to stimulate with them the thought and imagination of his century or of after-times. So Spinoza has made his distinction between adequate and inadequate ideas a current notion for educated Europe. So Hegel seized a single pregnant sentence of Heracleitus, and cast it, with a thousand striking applications, into the world of modern thought. But to do this is only enough to make a philosopher noteworthy; it is not enough to make him great. To be great, he must have something in him which can influence character, which is edifying; he must, in short, have a noble and lofty character himself, a character,—to recur to that much-criticised expression of mine,—*in the grand style*. This is what Spinoza had; and because he had it, he stands out from the multitude of philosophers, and has been able to inspire in powerful minds a feeling which the most remarkable philosophers, without this grandiose character, could not inspire. “There is no possible view of life but Spinoza’s,” said Lessing. Goethe has told us how he was calmed and edified by him in his youth, and how he again went to him for



support in his maturity. Heine, the man (in spite of his faults) of truest genius that Germany has produced since Goethe,—a man with faults, as I have said, immense faults, the greatest of them being that he could reverence so little,—reverenced Spinoza. Hegel's influence ran off him like water: "I have seen Hegel," he cries, "seated with his doleful air of a hatching hen upon his unhappy eggs, and I have heard his dismal clucking.—How easily one can cheat oneself into thinking that one understands everything, when one has learnt only how to construct dialectical formulas!" But of Spinoza, Heine said: "His life was a copy of the life of his divine kinsman, Jesus Christ."

And therefore, when M. Van Vloten violently presses the parallel with the post-Hegelians, one feels that the parallel with St. Augustine is the far truer one. Compared with the soldier of irreligion M. Van Vloten would have him to be, Spinoza is religious. "It is true," one may say to the wise and devout Christian, "Spinoza's conception of beatitude is not yours, and cannot satisfy you, but whose conception of beatitude would you accept as satisfying? Not even that of the devoutest of your fellow-Christians. Fra Angelico, the sweetest and most inspired of devout souls, has given us, in his great picture of the Last Judgment, his conception of beatitude. The elect are going round in a ring on long grass under laden fruit-trees; two of them, more restless than the others, are flying up a battlemented street,—a street blank with all the ennui of the Middle Ages. Across a gulf is visible, for the delectation of the saints, a blazing



caldron in which Beelzebub is sousing the damned. This is hardly more your conception of beatitude than Spinoza's is. But 'in my Father's house are many mansions;' only, to reach any one of these mansions, there are needed the wings of a genuine sacred transport, of an 'immortal longing.' These wings Spinoza had; and, because he had them, his own language about himself, about his aspirations and his course, is true: his foot is in the *vera vita*, his eye on the beatific vision.



## X

## MARCUS AURELIUS.

MR. MILL says, in his book on Liberty, that "Christian morality is in great part merely a protest against paganism ; its ideal is negative rather than positive, passive rather than active." He says, that, in certain most important respects, "it falls far below the best morality of the ancients." Now, the object of systems of morality is to take possession of human life, to save it from being abandoned to passion or allowed to drift at hazard, to give it happiness by establishing it in the practice of virtue ; and this object they seek to attain by prescribing to human life fixed principles of action, fixed rules of conduct. In its uninspired as well as in its inspired moments, in its days of languor and gloom as well as in its days of sunshine and energy, human life has thus always a clue to follow, and may always be making way towards its goal. Christian morality has not failed to supply to human life aids of this sort. It has supplied them far more abundantly than many of its critics imagine. The most exquisite document



after those of the New Testament, of all the documents the Christian spirit has ever inspired,—the *Imitation*,—by no means contains the whole of Christian morality; nay, the disparagers of this morality would think themselves sure of triumphing if one agreed to look for it in the *Imitation* only. But even the *Imitation* is full of passages like these: “*Vita sine proposito languida et vaga est;*”—“*Omni die renovare debemus propositum nostrum, dicentes: nunc hodiè perfectè incipiamus, quia nihil est quod hactenus fecimus;*”—“*Secundum propositum nostrum est cursus profectûs nostri;*”—“*Raro etiam unum vitium perfectè vincimus, et ad quotidianum profectum non accendimur;*”—“*Semper aliquid certi proponendum est;*”—“*Tibi ipsi violentiam frequenter fac:*” (*A life without a purpose is a languid, drifting thing;—Every day we ought to renew our purpose, saying to ourselves: This day let us make a sound beginning, for what we have hitherto done is nought;—Our improvement is in proportion to our purpose;—We hardly ever manage to get completely rid even of one fault, and do not set our hearts on daily improvement;—Always place a definite purpose before thee;—Get the habit of mastering thine inclination.*) These are moral precepts, and moral precepts of the best kind. As rules to hold possession of our conduct, and to keep us in the right course through outward troubles and inward perplexity, they are equal to the best ever furnished by the great masters of morals—Epictetus or Marcus Aurelius.

But moral rules, apprehended as ideas first, and then rigorously followed as laws, are, and must be,



for the sage only. The mass of mankind have neither force of intellect enough to apprehend them clearly as ideas, nor force of character enough to follow them strictly as laws. The mass of mankind can be carried along a course full of hardship for the natural man, can be borne over the thousand impediments of the narrow way, only by the tide of a joyful and bounding emotion. It is impossible to rise from reading Epictetus or Marcus Aurelius without a sense of constraint and melancholy, without feeling that the burden laid upon man is well-nigh greater than he can bear. Honour to the sages who have felt this, and yet have borne it ! Yet, even for the sage, this sense of labour and sorrow in his march towards the goal constitutes a relative inferiority ; the noblest souls of whatever creed, the pagan Empedocles as well as the Christian Paul, have insisted on the necessity of an inspiration, a joyful emotion, to make moral action perfect ; an obscure indication of this necessity is the one drop of truth in the ocean of verbiage with which the controversy on justification by faith has flooded the world. But, for the ordinary man, this sense of labour and sorrow constitutes an absolute disqualification ; it paralyses him ; under the weight of it, he cannot make way towards the goal at all. The paramount virtue of religion is, that it has *lighted up* morality ; that it has supplied the emotion and inspiration needful for carrying the sage along the narrow way perfectly, for carrying the ordinary man along it at all. Even the religions with most dross in them have had something of this virtue ; but



the Christian religion manifests it with unexampled splendour. "Lead me, Zeus and Destiny!" says the prayer of Epictetus, "whithersoever I am appointed to go; I will follow without wavering; even though I turn coward and shrink, I shall have to follow all the same." The fortitude of that is for the strong, for the few; even for them the spiritual atmosphere with which it surrounds them is bleak and gray. But, "Let thy loving spirit lead me forth into the land of righteousness;"—"The Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory;"—"Unto you that fear my name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings," says the Old Testament; "Born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God;"—"Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God;"—"Whatsoever is born of God, overcometh the world," says the New. The ray of sunshine is there, the glow of a divine warmth;—the austerity of the sage melts away under it, the paralysis of the weak is healed; he who is vivified by it renews his strength; "all things are possible to him;" "he is a new creature."

Epictetus says: "Every matter has two handles, one of which will bear taking hold of, the other not. If thy brother sin against thee, lay not hold of the matter by this, that he sins against thee; for by this handle the matter will not bear taking hold of. But rather lay hold of it by this, that he is thy brother, thy born mate; and thou wilt take hold of it by what will bear handling." Jesus, being asked whether a



man is bound to forgive his brother as often as seven times, answers: "I say not unto thee, until seven times, but until seventy times seven." Epictetus here suggests to the reason grounds for forgiveness of injuries which Jesus does not; but it is vain to say that Epictetus is on that account a better moralist than Jesus, if the warmth, the emotion, of Jesus's answer fires his hearer to the practice of forgiveness of injuries, while the thought in Epictetus's leaves him cold. So with Christian morality in general: its distinction is not that it propounds the maxim, "Thou shalt love God and thy neighbour," with more development, closer reasoning, truer sincerity, than other moral systems; it is that it propounds this maxim with an inspiration which wonderfully catches the hearer and makes him act upon it. It is because Mr. Mill has attained to the perception of truths of this nature, that he is,—instead of being, like the school from which he proceeds, doomed to sterility,—a writer of distinguished mark and influence, a writer deserving all attention and respect; it is (I must be pardoned for saying) because he is not sufficiently leavened with them, that he falls just short of being a great writer.

That which gives to the moral writings of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius their peculiar character and charm, is their being suffused and softened by something of this very sentiment whence Christian morality draws its best power. Mr. Long has recently published in a convenient form a translation of these writings, and has thus enabled English



readers to judge Marcus Aurelius for themselves; he has rendered his countrymen a real service by so doing. Mr. Long's reputation as a scholar is a sufficient guarantee of the general fidelity and accuracy of his translation; on these matters, besides, I am hardly entitled to speak, and my praise is of no value. But that for which I and the rest of the unlearned may venture to praise Mr. Long is this; that he treats Marcus Aurelius's writings, as he treats all the other remains of Greek and Roman antiquity which he touches, not as a dead and dry matter of learning, but as documents with a side of modern applicability and living interest, and valuable mainly so far as this side in them can be made clear; that as in his notes on Plutarch's Roman Lives he deals with the modern epoch of Cæsar and Cicero, not as food for schoolboys, but as food for men, and men engaged in the current of contemporary life and action, so in his remarks and essays on Marcus Aurelius he treats this truly modern striver and thinker not as a Classical Dictionary hero, but as a present source from which to draw "example of life, and instruction of manners." Why may not a son of Dr. Arnold say, what might naturally here be said by any other critic, that in this lively and fruitful way of considering the men and affairs of ancient Greece and Rome, Mr. Long resembles Dr. Arnold?

One or two little complaints, however, I have against Mr. Long, and I will get them off my mind at once. In the first place, why could he not have found gentler and juster terms to describe the trans-



lation of his predecessor, Jeremy Collier,—the redoubtable enemy of stage plays,—than these: “a most coarse and vulgar copy of the original?” As a matter of taste, a translator should deal leniently with his predecessor; but putting that out of the question, Mr. Long’s language is a great deal too hard. Most English people who knew Marcus Aurelius before Mr. Long appeared as his introducer, knew him through Jeremy Collier. And the acquaintance of a man like Marcus Aurelius is such an imperishable benefit, that one can never lose a peculiar sense of obligation towards the man who confers it. Apart from this claim upon one’s tenderness, however, Jeremy Collier’s version deserves respect for its genuine spirit and vigour, the spirit and vigour of the age of Dryden. Jeremy Collier too, like Mr. Long, regarded in Marcus Aurelius the living moralist, and not the dead classic; and his warmth of feeling gave to his style an impetuosity and rhythm which from Mr. Long’s style (I do not blame it on that account) are absent. Let us place the two side by side. The impressive opening of Marcus Aurelius’s fifth book, Mr. Long translates thus:—

“In the morning when thou risest unwillingly, let this thought be present: I am rising to the work of a human being. Why then am I dissatisfied if I am going to do the things for which I exist and for which I was brought into the world, Or have I been made for this, to lie in the bed-clothes and keep myself warm?—But this is more



pleasant.—Dost thou exist then to take thy pleasure, and not at all for action or exertion?”

Jeremy Collier has :—

“When you find an unwillingness to rise early in the morning, make this short speech to yourself: “I am getting up now to do the business of a man; and am I out of humour for going about that which I was made for, and for the sake of which I was sent into the world? Was I then designed for nothing but to doze and batten beneath the counterpane? I thought action had been the end of your being.””

In another striking passage, again, Mr. Long has :—

“No longer wonder at hazard; for neither wilt thou read thy own memoirs, nor the acts of the ancient Romans and Hellenes, and the selections from books which thou wast reserving for thy old age. Hasten then to the end which thou hast before thee, and, throwing away idle hopes, come to thine own aid, if thou carest at all for thyself, while it is in thy power.”

Here his despised predecessor has :—

“Don't go too far in your books and overgrasp yourself. Alas, you have no time left to peruse your diary, to read over the Greek and Roman history: come, don't flatter and deceive yourself; look to the main chance, to the end and design of reading, and mind life more than notion: I say, if you have a kindness for your person, drive at the practice and help yourself, for that is in your own power.”



It seems to me that here for style and force Jeremy Collier can (to say the least) perfectly stand comparison with Mr. Long. Jeremy Collier's real defect as a translator is not his coarseness and vulgarity, but his imperfect acquaintance with Greek; this is a serious defect, a fatal one; it rendered a translation like Mr. Long's necessary. Jeremy Collier's work will now be forgotten, and Mr. Long stands master of the field; but he may be content, at any rate, to leave his predecessor's grave unharmed, even if he will not throw upon it, in passing, a handful of kindly earth.

Another complaint I have against Mr. Long is, that he is not quite idiomatic and simple enough. It is a little formal, at least, if not pedantic, to say *Ethic* and *Dialectic*, instead of *Ethics* and *Dialectics*, and to say "*Hellenes* and Romans" instead of "*Greeks* and Romans." And why, too,—the name of Antoninus being preoccupied by Antoninus Pius,—will Mr. Long call his author Marcus *Antoninus* instead of Marcus *Aurelius*? Small as these matters appear, they are important when one has to deal with the general public, and not with a small circle of scholars; and it is the general public that the translator of a short masterpiece on morals, such as is the book of Marcus Aurelius, should have in view; his aim should be to make Marcus Aurelius's work as popular as the *Imitation*, and Marcus Aurelius's name as familiar as Socrates's. In rendering or naming him, therefore, punctilious accuracy of phrase is not so much to be sought as accessibility and cur



rency ; everything which may best enable the Emperor and his precepts *volitare per ora virum*. It is essential to render him in language perfectly plain and unprofessional, and to call him by the name by which he is best and most distinctly known. The translators of the Bible talk of *pence* and not *denarii*, and the admirers of Voltaire do not celebrate him under the name of Arouet.

But, after these trifling complaints are made, one must end, as one began, in unfeigned gratitude to Mr. Long for his excellent and substantial reproduction in English of an invaluable work. In general the substantiality, soundness, and precision of Mr. Long's rendering are (I will venture, after all, to give my opinion about them) as conspicuous as the living spirit with which he treats antiquity ; and these qualities are particularly desirable in the translator of a work like that of Marcus Aurelius, of which the language is often corrupt, almost always hard and obscure. Any one who wants to appreciate Mr. Long's merits as a translator may read, in the original and in Mr. Long's translation, the seventh chapter of the tenth book ; he will see how, through all the dubiousness and involved manner of the Greek, Mr. Long has firmly seized upon the clear thought which is certainly at the bottom of that troubled wording, and, in distinctly rendering this thought, has at the same time thrown round its expression a characteristic shade of painfulness and difficulty which just suits it. And Marcus Aurelius's book is one which, when it is rendered so accurately as Mr. Long renders it, even those



who know Greek tolerably well may choose to read rather in the translation than in the original. For not only are the contents here incomparably more valuable than the external form, but this form, the Greek of a Roman, is not exactly one of those styles which have a physiognomy, which are an essential part of their author, which stamp an indelible impression of him on the reader's mind. An old Lyons commentator finds, indeed, in Marcus Aurelius's Greek, something characteristic, something specially firm and imperial; but I think an ordinary mortal will hardly find this: he will find crabbed Greek, without any great charm of distinct physiognomy. The Greek of Thucydides and Plato has this charm, and he who reads them in a translation, however accurate, loses it, and loses much in losing it; but the Greek of Marcus Aurelius, like the Greek of the New Testament, and even more than the Greek of the New Testament, is wanting in it. If one could be assured that the English Testament were made perfectly accurate, one might be almost content never to open a Greek Testament again; and, Mr. Long's version of Marcus Aurelius being what it is, an Englishman who reads to live, and does not live to read, may henceforth let the Greek original repose upon its shelf.

The man whose thoughts Mr. Long has thus faithfully reproduced, is perhaps the most beautiful figure in history. He is one of those consoling and hope-inspiring marks, which stand for ever to remind our weak and easily discouraged race how high human goodness and perseverance have once been carried,



and may be carried again. The interest of mankind is peculiarly attracted by examples of signal goodness in high places; for that testimony to the worth of goodness is the most striking which is borne by those to whom all the means of pleasure and self-indulgence lay open, by those who had at their command the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. Marcus Aurelius was the ruler of the grandest of empires; and he was one of the best of men. Besides him, history presents one or two sovereigns eminent for their goodness, such as Saint Louis or Alfred. But Marcus Aurelius has, for us moderns, this great superiority in interest over Saint Louis or Alfred, that he lived and acted in a state of society modern by its essential characteristics, in an epoch akin to our own, in a brilliant centre of civilisation. Trajan talks of "our enlightened age" just as glibly as the *Times* talks of it. Marcus Aurelius thus becomes for us a man like ourselves, a man in all things tempted as we are. Saint Louis inhabits an atmosphere of mediæval Catholicism, which the man of the nineteenth century may admire, indeed, may even passionately wish to inhabit, but which, strive as he will, he cannot really inhabit. Alfred belongs to a state of society (I say it with all deference to the *Saturday Review* critic who keeps such jealous watch over the honour of our Saxon ancestors) half barbarous. Neither Alfred nor Saint Louis can be morally and intellectually as near to us as Marcus Aurelius.

The record of the outward life of this admirable man has in it little of striking incident. He was



born at Rome on the 26th of April, in the year 121 of the Christian era. He was nephew and son-in-law to his predecessor on the throne, Antoninus Pius. When Antoninus died, he was forty years old, but from the time of his earliest manhood he had assisted in administering public affairs. Then, after his uncle's death in 161, for nineteen years he reigned as emperor. The barbarians were pressing on the Roman frontier, and a great part of Marcus Aurelius's nineteen years of reign was passed in campaigning. His absences from Rome were numerous and long. We hear of him in Asia Minor, Syria, Egypt, Greece ; but, above all, in the countries on the Danube, where the war with the barbarians was going on,—in Austria, Moravia, Hungary. In these countries much of his *Journal* seems to have been written ; parts of it are dated from them ; and there, a few weeks before his fifty-ninth birthday, he fell sick and died.<sup>1</sup> The record of him on which his fame chiefly rests is the record of his inward life,—his *Journal*, or *Commentaries*, or *Meditations*, or *Thoughts*, for by all these names has the work been called. Perhaps the most interesting of the records of his outward life is that which the first book of this work supplies, where he gives an account of his education, recites the names of those to whom he is indebted for it, and enumerates his obligations to each of them. It is a refreshing and consoling picture, a priceless treasure for those, who, sick of the “wild and dreamlike trade of blood and guile,” which seems to be nearly the whole of

<sup>1</sup> He died on the 17th of March, A.D. 180.



what history has to offer to our view, seek eagerly for that substratum of right thinking and well-doing which in all ages must surely have somewhere existed, for without it the continued life of humanity would have been impossible. "From my mother I learnt piety and beneficence, and abstinence not only from evil deeds but even from evil thoughts; and further, simplicity in my way of living, far removed from the habits of the rich." Let us remember that, the next time we are reading the sixth satire of Juvenal. "From my tutor I learnt" (hear it, ye tutors of princes!) "endurance of labour, and to want little, and to work with my own hands, and not to meddle with other people's affairs, and not to be ready to listen to slander." The vices and foibles of the Greek sophist or rhetorician—the *Græculus esuriens*—are in everybody's mind; but he who reads Marcus Aurelius's account of his Greek teachers and masters, will understand how it is that, in spite of the vices and foibles of individual *Græculi*, the education of the human race owes to Greece a debt which can never be overrated. The vague and colourless praise of history leaves on the mind hardly any impression of Antoninus Pius: it is only from the private memoranda of his nephew that we learn what a disciplined, hard-working, gentle, wise, virtuous man he was; a man who, perhaps, interests mankind less than his immortal nephew only because he has left in writing no record of his inner life,—*caret quia vate sacro*.

Of the outward life and circumstances of Marcus Aurelius, beyond these notices which he has himself



supplied, there are few of much interest and importance. There is the fine anecdote of his speech when he heard of the assassination of the revolted Avidius Cassius, against whom he was marching ; *he was sorry, he said, to be deprived of the pleasure of pardoning him.* And there are one or two more anecdotes of him which show the same spirit. But the great record for the outward life of a man who has left such a record of his lofty inward aspirations as that which Marcus Aurelius has left, is the clear consenting voice of all his contemporaries,—high and low, friend and enemy, pagan and Christian,—in praise of his sincerity, justice, and goodness. The world's charity does not err on the side of excess, and here was a man occupying the most conspicuous station in the world, and professing the highest possible standard of conduct ;—yet the world was obliged to declare that he walked worthily of his profession. Long after his death, his bust was to be seen in the houses of private men through the wide Roman empire. It may be the vulgar part of human nature which busies itself with the semblance and doings of living sovereigns, it is its nobler part which busies itself with those of the dead ; these busts of Marcus Aurelius, in the homes of Gaul, Britain, and Italy, bear witness, not to the inmates' frivolous curiosity about princes and palaces, but to their reverential memory of the passage of a great man upon the earth.

Two things, however, before one turns from the outward to the inward life of Marcus Aurelius, force themselves upon one's notice, and demand a word of