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# OUR MORAL NATURE

BEING

A BRIEF SYSTEM OF ETHICS

✓  
BY

JAMES McCOSH, D.D., LL.D., D.L.

EX-PRESIDENT OF PRINCETON COLLEGE

NEW YORK

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## *INTRODUCTORY NOTE*

THE human mind has been the study of my life.

I have published two volumes on Psychology generally ; one on the Cognitive, and the other on the Motive Powers. I have issued a volume of Metaphysics, on First and Fundamental Truths. I have published a volume of Logic, being the Laws of Discursive Thought. I now present another on Ethics, or, Our Moral Nature. I have issued two volumes, one didactic, the other historical, on Realistic Philosophy.

I have published a work on the Tests of Various Sorts of Truth, in opposition to the prevailing agnosticism ; and I have presented a little volume inquiring whether the prevailing philosophies can give us Reality logically. This work, if carried out consistently, will undermine the current ideal philosophy by giving Reality its

proper place. I should like to write a brief treatise on Æsthetics. But I have already treated, so far, of this subject in the Motive Powers, and it is doubtful if advancing age will admit of my doing more.

PRINCETON, May, 1892.

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# OUR MORAL NATURE

## PART FIRST

### FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

SECT. I. AIM OF THE TREATISE.—In my earlier volumes I have fully exposed the nature of our Intellect, of our Feelings, and of our Will. But no one of these, nor can the whole, give to man his morality and his moral ideas. In this treatise I am to show that man is a moral agent, and expound his moral ideas and powers.

It is one of the shortest of the common treatises on Ethics or Moral Philosophy. This because the collateral topics usually discussed in ethical works are treated of in my other philosophic works. I can refer those who wish for a fuller exposition of kindred mental subjects to my two volumes on Psychology.

I may mention that in these works I show that man is a personal being. I therefore assume the doctrine and use it in this work.

SECT. II. MORAL OBLIGATION.— We are all familiar with Moral Obligation in this our crowded world.

There are acts which are obligatory physically, such as partaking of food and taking exercise, in order to preserve our health. These acts we are required to attend to by the necessities of our nature.

There are other acts which are felt to be obligatory, but which we are not required to do by any external force: to keep our promise, to pay our debts, to hold by our contracts. There may be no external power constraining such acts. We are prompted to them by internal motives which show that there is will in them; we feel that we ought to perform them. A burden is laid upon us which we are not at liberty to decline. We feel reproach when we contravene the act, or when we neglect it.

Now this second class of obligatory acts we call moral, and the violation we call immoral. It is our business in this little work to inquire into their nature and expose them to view. To use a common statement, ethics has to do not with what is, but what ought to be; not with *quid est*, but with *quid oportet*.

SECT. III. CONSCIENCE. — I am not sure whether I should not have begun with Conscience rather than Obligation. It is to the Conscience we owe the Obligation. We first feel the obligation, and then refer it to our moral nature, and specially to the conscience.

I am not here to trace the full nature of conscience. This I have done elsewhere in "Psychology, the Motive Powers;" I am simply to look upon it in certain aspects. We must look upon it as implying that certain acts are obligatory.

But specially I am to look upon it as cognitive. It discerns the good and the evil; it accepts the one and it rejects the other.

Some speak and write as if the conscience were an arbitrary, or at best merely a positive power enjoined by Him who planted it in our constitution. But conscience is a cognitive power; it discerns the good and the evil in the act, say benevolence or malevolence, just as the eye perceives color, say red or blue, in that flower, or as the muscular senses feel resistance in that stone which we hold in the hand. The good and the bad are in the acts, and are perceived by what has been expressively called the Moral Sense.

It is to be carefully noticed that it is not the

decision of conscience that makes an action good or bad. It is good or evil in itself, and its character is discovered by the moral power which approves or disapproves accordingly. It perceives benevolence to be good, it perceives cruelty to be bad ; and perceives both to be so in their very nature, just as we perceive lead to be heavy and feathers to be light.

It is a curious circumstance that the word for conscience is not found in ancient Hebrew nor in Greek till after the time of Aristotle. The word in Greek is *συνείδησις*, and in Latin is *conscientia* ; both signifying joint knowledge and action, that is, a knowledge of the act with its moral character. The phrase is used in the Greek Testament on various occasions, in all cases appropriately and expressively. There is the answer of a good conscience toward God (1 Pet. iii. 21). This supports us when we are falsely accused. There are persons of whom it might be said that their mind and conscience, that is, that their understanding and moral perceptions, are defiled (Titus i. 15). We meet at times with people in whom, as the result of a long course of wickedness, their consciences are "seared as with a hot iron" (1 Tim. iv. 2). In

such, indeed in all cases, we need to have our "hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience" (Heb. x. 22). This seems to be the accurate account psychologically, according to our observation and experience. The conscience, whenever it acts, does so with authority, making man a moral agent. Though the conscience was not separated from other powers, or named till a hundred years or so before Christ, yet all along the soul undivided is spoken of as condemning the evil and approving the good.

There has been much discussion as to whether the conscience can be perverted, or whether it can be corrupted. It seems to some that conscience is a divine power planted in the mind by God, at once perfect, and never to be led astray or deteriorated. But, on the other hand, it does look as if the conscience, like every other faculty in our nature, may be led astray. It may become dull and obtuse, as, for instance, in heathen countries, where it may be satisfied with irrational creeds and unworthy ceremonies. It is notorious that the conscience is apt to fall into a slumberous state, and give little or no notice of temptation assailing us. In some cases it has become so perverted that it has declared

evil to be good ; it has declared persecution to be good, which it never is. In other cases it has declared good to be evil, declared kindness to enemies to be a crime. At times, as among robbers, it has sanctioned deeds that are cruel and revengeful. There are cases in which the conscience can be made to accuse itself and condemn its own acts. It seems clear to me that there are cases in which the lower passions of our nature are ever overmastering our moral perceptions. The Scriptures are right when they speak of the conscience as "defiled," as being "seared as with a hot iron."

It is clear that the conscience is placed in the very heart of our nature for a purpose—that it may be a prompter and monitor. Like the bee, it has its sweets, but it has also its sting. When it is obeyed willingly there is a glow of satisfaction. Its reproaches may become very fearful, disclosing to us the sins which have been committed, and the awful gulfs into which we may fall. The accusations of conscience may be the acutest of all the miseries to which we are exposed, lacerating us like the wild beasts, or stinging like innumerable insects.

It has its rewards. The deed enjoined having

been done there is a glow of satisfaction. It has its penalties. The act enjoined having been opposed, or even neglected, we have a regret, a dissatisfaction, or a reproach, which disturbs and annoys us. In attending to what is commanded we are conscious that we are doing right, and have more or less anticipation that the consequences must be good. In disobeying we have an idea and a feeling more or less distinct of evil to come sooner or later.

The science is made up of the acts morally sanctioned or condemned. It has often been called Moral Philosophy because it arranges into a system the acts approved or disapproved.

SECT. IV. MORAL LAW.—Morality is fitly characterized by the phrase which Kant has constructed and employed, the Categorical Imperative. It is categorical in that it is definite. It allows certain acts. It prohibits others. But it is so designated chiefly in that it is imperative. It affirms of certain facts, not simply in the indicative mood that they are, or in the subjunctive mood that they may be, but in the imperative mood that they are to be done or that they are not to be done.



The moral law is authoritative. It issues orders, it issues prohibitions. It says thou shalt love God ; thou shalt love thy fellow-man. It farther declares thou art sinning, that is, transgressing law ; thou art not loving God, thou art not loving thy fellow-man as thou oughtest.

Our great ethical writer, Bishop Butler, deals especially with the authority of our moral nature. He shows not only that man has a conscience to discover the good and the evil, but that this conscience has authority, and supreme authority, that not only does it reign, but it reigns supreme, above every other power—above the intelligence, above the feelings.

SECT. V. LOVE.—Love is one of the most important qualities which make an action good. Sometimes it is a general philanthropy extending to all persons and prompting us to do them good. More frequently it is an affection to families or individuals.

It may mingle with all other affections, and in doing so it gives them a moral character. It is capable of making the simplest actions good, even those acts which we perform from day to

day and from hour to hour. It has a place in all the deeds that are truly virtuous, and imparts a virtuousness to them.

Having discovered God by the evident traces of design and law, we at once discover that we stand in a special relation to Him. He is our creator, preserver, and ruler ; and we discover that we owe love and obedience to Him. I am convinced that He is the author, He is certainly the guardian of morality. We stand also in a close relation to our fellow-men. We owe them affection, and kind of service according to circumstances.

Love may manifest itself in two forms.

*The Love of Complacency and Affection.*—We delight in the object or person beloved. It is thus that the mother clasps her infant to her bosom ; thus that the sister interests herself in every movement of her little brother ; thus that the father, saying little but feeling much, follows the career of his son in the trying rivalries of the world ; thus that throughout our lives our hearts, if hearts we have, cling round the tried friend of our youth ; thus that the wife would leave this world with the last look on her husband ; thus that the father would depart with

his sons and daughters around his couch. There is a last look which love remembers—that given, for instance, when the ship moves away with the dear friend in it, or when the soul leaves the earth to wing its way to heaven. Love looks out for the person loved. The mother readily discovers her son in that crowd. The blacksmith

Hears his daughter's voice  
Singing in the village choir.

*The Love of Benevolence.*—In this we not only delight in the contemplation and society of the persons loved ; we wish well to them, we wish them all that is good, and so far as in our power we do them all that is good. We will oblige them if we can ; we will serve them if it is in our power ; we will watch for opportunities of promoting their welfare ; we will make sacrifices for their welfare. This love is ready to flow toward relatives and friends, toward neighbors and companions, toward all with whom we come in contact ; it will go out toward the whole family of mankind. We are ready to increase their happiness, and in the highest exercises of love

to raise them in the scales of being and to exalt them morally and spiritually.

The love of God thus manifests itself in multiplying happiness or spreading holiness. But it may be asked, How can this benevolence be exhibited by us toward God, who is independent of us and needs not our aid? The answer is, We identify ourselves with Him, and strive to promote His glory and the causes in which He is interested.

These two forms of love are not inconsistent with each other; they should always be united. Without the affection charity is felt to be cold. Without the benevolence the charity would be felt to be hypocritical. The two joined give us the full-orbed grace—all light and no shadow.

SECT. VI. THE DIVINE EXISTENCE.—Man is led naturally to believe in God. I do not maintain, with Schleiermacher, that he has a God-consciousness or an immediate perception of God. What I hold is, that man is induced by the instance of adaptation or design, to which his attention is ever called in his own person and in all around him, to believe in One who is the author of it all. This is the argument which has

had power on men in all ages, and to which Mr. John S. Mill advises us to adhere. We see it in the adaptation of one thing to another, of the bones to form joints suited to the position which they occupy; at the shoulders to give a rotatory motion, and a direct motion backward and forward in the fingers and toes. We see it in the events of providence, encouraging what is good and chastising what is bad.

There is another argument telling powerfully on all, and regarded by some as stronger than any other. It is what is called the *moral argument*. We find a belief rising in us of the existence of God, and in doing so we know so much of His nature. We come to know Him as a moral God. We know that morality is defective when He has not a place in it, and is the very life of it. When God commands, morality is felt to be infallible and unchangeable. As these principles act the mind has a new idea not embraced in any other science; it is that of moral excellence. This claims to govern our whole nature. It is the subject specially discussed by the great ethical writer, Bishop Butler. The love makes the whole process lovely and attractive.

## SECT. VII. THE COMBINED MORAL PRINCIPLES.

—The above seem the deeper principles, constituting indeed the very essence of our moral nature. It is the office of Ethics to exhibit them to the view. I am not sure in what order they come or which should be first stated. They seem to appear simultaneously. They act and react upon each other. They act various parts and serve somewhat different ends ; but they combine in a common issue and constitute a unity, even as the mind itself is a Unity. Morality is a concrete mass, the different aspects of which may be separately considered, but cannot be separated in fact.

The Obligation prepares for the discovery of moral acts. It is the science of right and obligation. The Conscience actually reveals the acts as good or bad. The Law makes the acts imperative, and enjoins the precepts and prohibitions. There is always an appeal to God, and there is no appeal to a power beyond God. He is seated as on a watch-tower, and nothing escapes his notice. He looks down upon us as Christ looked upon the poor woman who threw her mite into the treasury, being all that she had. Morality is ever felt to be weak when it is not sanctioned by God.

SECT. VIII. THE WILL.—It will be readily allowed that all good and all evil lie in the region of the Will. Now the essential element in Will is choice. But Will must include more than the mere resolution to act. It must embrace Wish, indeed all acts of selection or choice. It is only when the mind is thus exercised that the act can be called ours.

When we wish or will that which is according to law the act can be called moral ; when we wish or will that which is contrary to the law, the act is immoral.

Kant is ever speaking of Will as one of the essentials of morality. He thus opens his work on "The Practical Reason : " "Nothing can possibly be conceived in the world, or even out of the world, that can be called good without qualification, except a good will." This is an important principle which can and should be defended. The actions we perform in order to their being moral have been chosen by the performer. Till this is done the act can scarcely be said to be ours. When the choice is made the action is ours, and we may be regarded as responsible for it.



SECT. IX. EVANGELICAL ETHICS. — The principles enumerated all proceed on the idea that man has not violated them ; in other words, that man has not sinned. But, in fact, man has not done what he ought to have done. He has not followed his moral obligations ; he has not obeyed his conscience when it tells him what is right. He has not followed that law which is his rule of life. He has given offence to God. In other words, he has not conformed to those principles which are in his constitution. Nor is there in these principles any means of rectifying our nature.

But all this does not free man from the obligations which are still binding upon him. His conscience finds fault with his neglect ; the law condemns him ; God is angry with him. Still these regulating principles of our moral nature are not thereby cancelled or even lowered, but are as imperative as ever. The ethics that are binding on the perfect man are equally binding on the sinful man. We can draw a moral philosophy from man's fallen nature quite as readily as from his upright nature.

What is not made known by natural ethics is revealed in Scripture. The way is opened where-



by the sinner becomes reconciled to God. Meanwhile the dignity of morality and its law are carefully preserved. Restoration is effected by what we should have done being done by another, who on the one hand is connected with God, and on the other hand becomes man. Christianity comes in with Redemption and Grace : with Redemption to relieve us from the past, with Grace to strengthen us for the future. All the old virtues—Honesty, Temperance, Charity, Love—are as binding as ever. But new ones, becoming our restored condition, are added ; all implied in the original principles which we have been expounding. Then there are certain acts of humiliation becoming our position, such as distrust of ourselves, a sense of dependence. In particular there is Repentance, fully described in the Catechism of the Westminster divines as a grace in which the sinner, “ out of a true sense of his sin and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, turns from it unto God (the *μετανοία* of Scripture) with full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience.” Along with this there is encouragement. Such is Faith, which accepts of the offer and is itself accepted. From this emerge Hope, Love, and Protection in the fut-

ure. We have now an Evangelical service in the room of a moral obedience. Over all there is a clothing of Humility.

SECT. X. SIN.—We live in a world where sin is more common than excellence. Sin is the neglect, or, more criminal, the violation of a law which we are bound to obey. That law is revealed unto us. We know that we ought to obey it. We know that we have not obeyed it, and that therefore we are sinners. This is the condition of every man. It is of unspeakable importance that we should know all this, but the majority of men do not know it. The consequence is, on the one hand they are in a dull, stupid state; not contented, but not knowing whence their discontent arises; or in a distracted state, feeling their need of peace and yet scarcely knowing how peace is to be had, and they look round for it. Such is the natural state of man. The very craving is an evidence of man being essentially a moral being.

SECT. XI. PUNISHMENT.—Our moral nature, especially the Conscience, which is the expression of our moral nature, determines that certain acts are evil; the same moral nature, with

its adjuncts, especially the understanding, declares that certain acts should be punished.

The punishment has two ends in view. One is to mark disapprobation of the deeds ; the other is premonitory, to prevent a recurrence of the offence. Both of these are kept in view by God, and are to be kept in view by man in the exercise of his power.

In all cases God is to be regarded as the inflicter of punishment. This he accomplishes in this world or in the world to come. Every one has to appear before God in judgment, whether he has done good or done evil.

To the civil magistrate God has given a special power, to mark the crime and to prevent its recurrence. The individual citizen is not to take this power on himself, but to hand it over to the magistrate, who has to judge for himself, being always responsible to God. There are cases in which the culprit, if allowed to live, might endanger the lives of peaceful citizens, and in these preventive punishment should be rigorously inflicted.

SECT. XII. ETHICS CONSIDERED OBJECTIVELY.—  
Hitherto ethics have been viewed very much un-

der a subjective aspect. They are, in fact, very much a mental process. But they have an objective side. External facts correspond to the internal facts and confirm them. One who pursues an honest and industrious course of life will commonly be successful, by the arrangement of Him who hath appointed all things. Outward propriety of conduct will commonly be accompanied with peace and approbation. The idle man is almost always liable to fail. The cunning and deceitful man is apt to be viewed with distrust and suspicion. There is thus a correspondence between the internal feeling, good or bad, and the external circumstances. The morality within is sanctioned by the outward product. Both countenance that which is good and lay restraints on that which is evil. They conspire to show that man is a moral agent, and may contribute to moral excellence.

## PART SECOND

### MORAL IDEAS

IN this Part I am to give some account of the Ideas connected with our moral nature. I begin with Happiness and its connection with Morality.

I am not to define Happiness. Every one who has felt it knows it, and no explanation can make it clearer.

We are instinctively led to wish for and promote our own happiness. So we should wish also to further the happiness of our fellow-men. God evidently intends us to do so.

God himself is evidently diffusing happiness. This is an end kept in view by Him in His works. We see it in the easy and effective power of motion given to us and to all mankind in the arrangement of the bones of our frame and the formation of the joints. There is a like adaptation through the whole organism of nature. As God does everywhere, so should we

also be promoting the felicity of all sensitive creatures.

SECT. XIII. HAPPINESS AND MORALITY.—There are two kinds of Good which we may seek: The one of these is Happiness, the other is Morality.

There is HAPPINESS. It may come from two distinct quarters. It may be got from external good, from bodily constitution, from health, from wealth and raiment, and from the blessings of life, whatever these may be.

Provided we violate no moral principle, provided we are all the while seeking for higher and moral ends, there is no impropriety, but the opposite, in seeking to promote our comfort or our higher felicity. When these blessings are bestowed upon us there is ground for gratitude to the Giver, which becomes a further source of contentment and felicity. The daily benefits we receive may, each of them being simple, be very small; but being continued and continuous, they become the main source of our happiness and the attractions which bind us to this world.

Both the promotion of Happiness and the Morality are obligatory.

SECT. XIV. MORAL EXCELLENCE.—We are examining our nature to hear what it says. It certainly allows that happiness may be sought, and enjoins it in various forms, say in comforts or in joys. But it as certainly says that there is at least one other thing to be sought, and that is moral excellence. There are times when these two come into collision; when men must either suffer or sin; must either tell a lie or lose a valuable property. Our moral nature decides that question at once, and cannot be made give any other answer than the one. It declares that we must keep our integrity and let everything else go.

There is gratitude for favors bestowed on us. There are the common civilities of life paid. There is special attention to those who are in need or who have claims upon us. There are the special demands of our home, of our relations, of the district, of our country. There are the claims which mankind have upon us, above all the duty of sending the Gospel to every creature, of making known the mercy of God to those who have sinned, and who therefore need it. These are ends which we should set before us habitually. In this way we are to fulfil the very ends of our being.

SECT. XV. JUSTICE.—The definition of it is “his own to every one,” *suum cuique*. We are to give every man his rights, whatever they may be. Herbert Spencer in his volume on “Justice” goes so far as to include under it even the lower animals, who have certain rights which we are bound to attend to. Brutes are to be treated with forbearance and kindness. It is one of the merits of Bentham and the utilitarians that they have included the lower animals, which demand justice of us.

But man has higher claims. Not only has he, like the brute creatures, a title to justice, but he is required as an intelligent being to give justice to the lower animals and to his fellow-man. This is a peculiarity of justice as a virtue on the part of man that he is bound to give justice to his fellow-men and to God. To God himself justice belongs as an essential attribute. All His creatures may expect from Him that which is right in time and in eternity.

SECT. XVI.—RIGHTS. On looking on the objects around us we feel that there are certain of them which we can claim as ours. Some, when traced to their source—indeed all of them—are



by the appointment of God. Such are the light and rains, of which no one can lawfully deprive us. Some seem to be ours by the very nature of things; thus parents have to provide for their children and to see them educated. Some seem to be ours by the customs of the country, such as the right to decent burial. Such is our property generally—in wages or in inheritance, in land or money or stocks. We can claim these. No one has a right to deprive us of them. Under the same head may be placed all that we earn by bodily or mental exertion, by our talents or our industry, and also by our ingenuity and our character. These are rights which we can claim for ourselves, and which we are bound to allow in others.

SECT. XVII. PROPERTY.—Almost every one has rights of some description given him by his father or mother, or earned by ability or industry on his own part. To these, when his right is established, he is entitled to adhere. No one has a right to deprive him of this property. If he parts with any portion of it, it is supposed by some equivalent being granted.

But to this same head belong some other

things which men value ; there belong, in particular, his character, his reputation. These constitute his property ; they belong to him, and he may turn them to whatever use he sees fit, and earn by them other property such as money or land or higher reputation. By this means society is bound together by bonds which impart confidence to the operations which are carried on, and tend to carry on these still farther, till society is bound together in a way which cannot readily be broken.

SECT. XVIII. BENEVOLENCE AND JUSTICE.—Both are allowed, both are required, each according to what is demanded in the circumstances. All men seek happiness, and God delights to bestow it. But there is another good which we ought to seek, and that is moral excellence.

There are times when we can have both. There is first health and happiness. There is also moral personal goodness. It is to be understood that when we can have both without any conflict we may seek and obtain both. But when there is a contest and conflict, which is to give way? Our nature properly interpreted decides that question in the name of conscience

and of God. The phrases good and right are applied to this high decision, the former denoting the love, the latter more especially the law.

In respect of the claims which Justice and Beneficence have upon us there is no difference. I am bound to pay a certain sum to this poor man for the work done for me. Not only so, but, as he cannot sustain himself and is my neighbor, I am bound to give him a decent sum in charity.

For the debt I owe him I am required to give the man a certain sum. But the obligation to charity is not thus definite. I am bound to give in charity to the poor, but how much—a dollar or a pound or ten pounds—this is left to myself. In this way God would sift and try us to make us manifest how much love or charity there is in us. This difference is often expressed by the distinction drawn between duties “of perfect and imperfect obligation.” We must carefully distinguish between the two, between a debt and charity, and we must be particularly careful not to reduce the rigid form of the former to the looser form of the less stringent. Both duties are to be performed. In both we are responsible to God.

SECT. XIX. SUMMUM BONUM.—The phrase was used by the ancients. It can be understood by us. It denotes the highest excellence.

I am not sure that it should be applied to mere happiness, even the highest and the purest. It would be more appropriately employed in speaking of the highest moral excellence. It may be most appropriately used when it leads to and is accompanied with the purest happiness. This is a *bonum* which all may seek to attain, and it is the *summum bonum*.

SECT. XX. VIRTUOUS ACTS.—As the result of these various discussions we should be able to determine what is the nature of virtue or moral excellence. Certainly Love is an element in it. It may not be there consciously ; but it is there in action. This is not all : there is also Law. The two combined give us virtuous action. Both are voluntary, though the voluntary action may be very much unobserved.

In ordinary cases there is no analysis by us of the elements. The whole is one noble impulse. The law presents us with the form, the love gives the wings. This is always, or almost always, accompanied by feeling. This diffuses

the sentiment throughout the soul and finds exit in lively affection.

The good man exercises love habitually. Under this becoming temper it becomes a habit or second nature to him. Were the great body of mankind under these guiding motives, the world would show an entirely different aspect. The various powers of the mind—sensitive, intellectual, and emotive—would come under one high motive. Corresponding actions would come forth to confirm the character and flow forth in beneficent acts.

SECT. XXI. MORALITY AND OUR NATURAL FACULTIES.—There are some who would explain all morality by the use of the ordinary faculties of the mind. According to a very general opinion, morality is supposed to consist of feelings only. This is so far a mistake. The exercise of our native powers is not in itself either virtuous or vicious any more than is the growth of the plant and animal. There is no morality in the senses, in the understanding or in the feelings, considered in themselves, though they all may be made moral or immoral according to the use made of them.

The senses have no morality directly, though they should be made to serve what is good. It is the office of the understanding to determine the precise nature of the acts. It will always be held that there is something defective in morality when no feeling is excited. But it is by a special moral power, by the power which discerns the good and the evil, that morality is discerned. When thus sanctioned the understanding and the feelings come in to aid the conscience and to render the moral ideas more clear and lively.

SECT. XXII. THE SABBATH.—Most of the duties we have to perform are imposed upon us by our moral nature, as, for example, to speak the truth and be honest in all our transactions. But some are enjoined positively by God. Of this character is the weekly Sabbath. It was not instituted, as some suppose, at Mount Sinai on the occasion of the departure of the children of Israel from Egypt, but at the creation of the world, as a day of rest to commemorate God's resting from His work of creation. It is probable that in Egypt the Israelites had some difficulty in keeping the Sabbath owing to the severity of their

oppressors. On coming to Sinai they are commanded to remember the Sabbath day as having been previously appointed. The Sabbath at Sinai had some peculiar restrictions suited to the dispensation, but not binding on us. After the resurrection of our Lord, the first day of the week, instead of the seventh, was kept as the Sabbath, in commemoration of His resurrection from the dead. This day has been kept ever since as a day of rest and of spiritual improvement. It is found that even the lower animals require it; horses, for instance, are apt to break down prematurely if made to draw heavy loads all days of the week. It has been an unspeakable privilege both to men's bodies and souls. All men and women require it to save them from incessant toil, and from the sinking down of both body and spirit. The observance of the Sabbath has thus become a moral and not a mere positive injunction. The Sabbath has been a great blessing to individuals, as giving them a time of rest from toil, and for higher exercises, and preparation for a better country, and to the community generally as giving leisure and motive for reflection and devotedness to God.



## PART THIRD.

### DUTIES.

SECT. XXIII. DUTIES TO GOD.—From the above Principles and Ideas certain practical acts are derived. These are *Duties*—something due, something to be paid.

These are so numerous that we must arrange them under heads, so as to be able to remember and employ them. Upon the whole the old and scriptural classification is the most intelligible and convenient. We are to live soberly, righteously, and godly. This would give us the division, only reversing the order, into the *duties we owe to God*, the *duties we owe to our fellow-men*, into the *duties we owe to ourselves*.

It may be difficult at times to carry out this division. Some of the duties of life might be put in more than one of the classes. In a sense all of them might be regarded as duties we owe God, who is supreme. This truth should always be carried with us, to induce us to do all our



actions to God and thus sanctify them. But there are duties which we owe specially to our fellow-men, and duties we owe to ourselves. Some of the duties we owe to ourselves we owe also to our neighbors, such as charity. In such cases all we have to do is to make a statement to this effect, say by placing the duty under two or more heads.

Beginning with our duties to God, Chalmers goes so far as to speak ("Natural Theol.," p. 56) of the duties laid upon us by the *probability or even the imagination of a God*. In our breasts, moving knowingly or unconsciously, there are prognostications of a superior power which prompt us to seek further till we discover the clear evidence of the existence of God and of His holy and righteous character. These prognostications we should not seek to repress, but rather follow them till they lead us to a satisfactory result, till they show us clearly the evidence of design and the proof of the existence of a Supreme Being of intelligence and wisdom, of purity and love. It is one of the highest offices of the imagination that it is ever prompting us to this, if we do not resist but rather follow it as a grand impulse.

As we contemplate the character of God as seen in His works, we feel that we ought to cherish toward Him at all times *a reverent and devout feeling*. This we owe to Him from His holy character and the relation in which we stand to Him, in whom we live and move and have our being. We owe this to Him from our weakness and our dependence upon him. In particular we owe Him *worship*. I do not know whether the precise form of worship is in all cases prescribed. We must take care to have it simple ; and we must secure that its splendor does not suppress its sincerity. An essential part of it is Praise, in which we exalt the Divine Being, and in doing so the feelings of admiration and love are called forth in our own breasts.

Another essential part is *Prayer*. "Prayer is the offering of our desires unto God for things agreeable to His will, with confession of our sins and thankful acknowledgment of His mercy" (Question of "Shorter Catechism" of Westminster Divines). Believing in the existence of God, and knowing His character, it is clearly our duty to pay Him some acknowledgment. We have to thank Him for His constant kindness and His precious gifts. We have to acknowledge our

many sins of heart, of speech, and behavior. All this implies a regular appeal and a perpetual communion with God. As it is due to Him so it is good for us thus to unbosom ourselves to Him. At times we may be obliged to make our prayers secret, without the use of words. But in all cases where it can be done we should use words in our petitions, as this makes our prayers definite and expressive.

Natural religion does not say from what quarters our public prayers are to be taken, from a prepared book of devotion or from extemporaneous expression. The former method is more apt to be precise and systematic, the latter to give a more free expression to the outpouring of the heart. A judicious combination of the two methods may often be the more expedient. In all cases formality is to be carefully avoided. Care must be taken to have public prayers express the wants of those who pray.

*Oaths* are certainly allowed in Scripture. But they are to be resorted to only on solemn occasions. In an oath we call God to witness that we speak the truth, or that we will perform what we promise. This gives greater security than an ordinary declaration, and is at times a means

of gaining confidence. We can get no stronger assurance from man than this appeal to God.

God has evidently causes in this world in which He is deeply interested. We are to seek out these, inquire what they imply, and carry them on as far as may be in our power. There are *missions* of various sorts. There is the conviction and conversion of sinners, and the prosperity of the church and its several branches. There is the suppression of vice, there is the propagation of morality throughout the world, or in some particular district in which we feel an interest. There is the cause of missions, domestic and foreign. There are causes which God favors and which He expects us to favor by giving our personal services or our money to their support. We are thus to labor till we secure for God the highest place in His own world and over all that world.

In general we are at once to *obey* whenever He has uttered a command, whatever be the sacrifice which we are required to make. The announcement may be made by the conscience as the vicegerent of God ; or it may be a command of Scripture. It may be an order to sell all that we have, and give to the poor, or to

promote some good cause. All that we have to assure ourselves of is that it is the will of God, and then obedience should instantly follow.

It is utterly inconceivable that God, who is above all, and is of a perfectly holy character, should require of us what is injurious to our best interests. He may require of us what are great sacrifices at the time, but which in the end will have greatly overbalancing recompenses.

SECT. XXIV. FALSE SYSTEMS.—The Scriptures everywhere condemn false religious systems which existed in their day, such as the worship of false gods. We are to do the same in regard to errors which prevail in our times.

*Materialism.*—It is depriving us and it is depriving God of one of the most essential of his perfections. It makes us and it makes Him a mass of matter of which we have no proof that it can think, that it can judge or reason, or that it can discover the relation of means and end. We perceive God everywhere performing acts which show that he is a spirit.

*Pantheism* is depriving God of one of his

highest perfections, of his personality. We possess this power, and should value it highly. We have received it from God, and must believe that He himself possesses it.

*Utilitarianism.*—It makes us look merely to happiness. It says that the highest duty is to provide for the greatest happiness of the greatest number. But the affairs of this world are so complicated that it is often difficult, at times impossible, to tell whether any given act is fitted to promote this end. What is meant to do so may turn out the very opposite, it may bring with it misery and not felicity.

SECT. XXV. DUTIES TO OUR FELLOW-MEN.—

We are to have a *respect toward man as man*. We are to honor all men. We are specially to have a sympathy with them in joy and sorrow. We are to rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep.

We are to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. What is the meaning of this? We have in our natures an instinctive love toward ourselves. This is appointed, and may be appealed to as the standard of love which we should cherish toward others.

This affection, when cherished, lifts us above *Selfishness*, into which we are so apt to fall, above *Resentment*, above *Murmuring* at the success of others, above *Envy*, above *Scandal*, above *Spitefulness*. We would not do any of these to ourselves, and duty requires that we do not any of them toward others. "We are to do unto others as we would that they should do unto us." Cherishing love toward all, we are to be looking out and waiting for opportunities of doing them good.

Cherishing these affections I think it is allowable to have *differences in rank* in the wealth possessed. This allows of a stimulus to people to rise in the world. It tends also to produce a higher style of manners among the upper classes, which stimulates the lower classes to seek to reach a like elevation. We must be careful not to carry these distinctions too far, lest we oppress the poorer classes. If I do not mistake the signs of the times, one of the burning questions in the social contest will be the inequalities of station.

We begin with *Integrity*. It is of importance that the young should start with a thorough spirit of uprightness. Without this the conduct



will be crooked and untrustworthy, and a spirit of suspicion and discontent will be gendered. The character of the man will suffer greatly by losing openness and frankness, and will go on to further excesses of the same kind, employing one deception to conceal another. The result is that suspicion will prevail throughout the community. Calumny of every kind is to be avoided, and a charitable rather than a harsh spirit is to be cherished, and it will come out in the habitual expression to others.

*Veracity.*—It is of vast moment, both to the individual and the community, that there should be a spirit of truthfulness prevalent. Without this we would not know what to believe and what not to believe, and a universal suspicious temper would be engendered. Children are to be specially trained to sincerity and truth-speaking in all circumstances. When this spirit is abroad it gives a wholesome breath to society and sweetens the intercourse which human beings have with one another. Various good ends may be accomplished which cannot be gained when there is a general spirit of jealousy and suspicion.

Writers on ethics may be disturbed by very



perplexing questions as to how we should speak to *imbeciles* and to *lunatics*. It is agreed on all hands that we are not required to speak the whole truth to them. The question arises whether we are ever at liberty to say to them what is not true. I reply that this is to be done as seldom as possible. The cases may be made very rare in which we speak what is not consistent with fact to a lunatic. When we do so speak we do it as unto a wall or a tree, believing that the persons spoken to are not intelligent or responsible. In most cases it is best to tell the truth, believing that the consequences will not be evil.

*Property.*—God has bestowed upon us certain powers and gifts which no one is at liberty to take from us or to interfere with. All attempts to deprive us of them is theft. Under the same head may be placed all purposes to deprive us of the right to earn property or to use it as we see fit. Honesty has ever been esteemed by people generally as one of the greatest of all virtues. The laws protecting it have been one of the greatest boons that can be conferred on man.

Under the same head may be placed our *character* and influence. They are property, and we

have a right to retain them and make a good use of them for our own good and that of others.

*The Duties of Communities.*—Mankind are required by their position to form themselves into communities, such as nations, towns, commercial companies, and clubs of various sorts. But no such association should be formed or joined where there is any illegal act to be done. On the supposition that all the requirements are lawful, there should be a rigid performance of duties to the members of the society and others with whom they stand in relation. There has been in America of late years a jealousy of trusts, which should always be carefully watched.

The moral law is binding on communities, as it is upon single persons. It is a fact that there are persons who commit, as members of a society, unjust deeds which they would shrink from as private persons.

*Esprit de corps*, which serves some good purposes, may often be encouraged in the spirit which pervades a body of soldiers or a class of students; but it must not be carried so far in any case as thereby to injure individuals.

*Masters and Servants.*—Servants have to give such service as was understood at their engage-

ment—this to be determined by custom or the law of the country. Masters and mistresses should have respect both to the best interests and feelings of their dependents. We all know how masters, and especially mistresses, are apt to complain of their servants. But the fault may lie in the caprice of those who are in authority. They should realize that the poor and dependent have also rights which are to be rigidly attended to. They should have liberty of thought and of religious worship. The good master or mistress commonly gets in the end good servants, who, as a rule, are apt to remain with those who are considerate and kind to them.

*The Family.*—Mankind are bound to form themselves into families for the good of the race, for its felicity, and for its welfare. There are duties binding on both father and mother. Both have to take care of the young, to see that their wants are supplied for the present, and that they are trained to a useful occupation for their future lives. Every one, even the rich, should have some work to do. It was a good custom of the ancient Jews that every one should have an employment ; we find that the Apostle Paul, though of a good family, was a tent-maker.

There are duties devolving on children. They have to show affection to parents ; they have to give obedience to them, except in cases where their commands are seen to be clearly contrary to the higher demands of God.

Brothers and sisters clearly owe affection and a degree of kindness to one another, and should be showing this perpetually. This interest should extend to more distant relationship, as far indeed as affection may be extended, or as far as special love is not lost in a general philanthropy.

*The Sexual Relationships.*—These are meant to add to our comforts, and are necessary for the continuation of the race. But they are apt to run into perilous excess, and need to be carefully guarded and limited. This is specially required in order to the upbringing of children, having a respect both to their bodily welfare and also to their training and character. The special restraint on the evils is marriage, which ought to be carefully guarded by law. “Marriage,” says Dr. Dorner, “is the union of two persons of opposite sexes in the most intimate fellowship of body and soul—a fellowship in which each personality has its deficiencies sup-

plied and both together form a higher unity." It is essentially monogamous and indissoluble, and only as such can it be morally contracted. "The positive condition is that there should be free choice and inward inclination, that is, that the two persons be ready to give themselves unreservedly to each other." There should only be one wife or one husband, that there may not be jealousies and quarrels, not a divided but one affection.

*Divorces* are becoming shamefully prevalent in various countries. They can be allowed morally only from causes which virtually abrogate the relationship: by unfaithfulness to the marriage tie or by wilful and proven abandonment. They should not be allowed from any other cause. If they take place otherwise, the parties should be punished.

Law and special marks of disgrace must be applied to adultery, to incest, to self-pollution, and unnatural crimes, as corrupting the individual and introducing immeasurable disorder and misery into the household.

*Our Irascible Affections.*—Our Maker has endowed us with such affections which commonly show themselves in some form of temper, as

quick or violent or sulky. They serve some good purposes. They may preserve us from insults or ill-usage of various sorts; may act like the prickles which grow on certain kinds of plants and keep them from being meddled with. But they are to be carefully watched and guarded. In all cases revenge is to be avoided. Vengeance is not a prerogative of man, who would most certainly abuse it. "Vengeance is mine," saith the Lord. He retains it in his own hand, because he alone is able to estimate the offences. A prevailing love is to be ready to keep all irritations within proper bounds.

*Gaming.*—It is dangerous to all. It is about the worst habit which the young man can form. Through its gains and losses it perturbs the mind at the time, and it is apt to lead to excesses. Under its influence the person is incapable of leading a quiet and domestic life. All this independent of the evil which we do to those with whom we gamble.

SECT. XXVI. TO THE CHURCHES.—I speak of them in the plural number, for they are now very numerous. It should be distinctly understood

that though they somewhat resemble each other, and both claim authority, yet the two, Church and State, are not the same. The temptation on the part of the Romish Church is to claim authority over the state. The disposition of some of the Protestant churches is to make the church subject to the state. The true position of the two is, that each should have its own position. The churches should rule in all spiritual matters, in expounding doctrine and in enjoining church orders. But the church should not meddle with money or temporalities of any kind, except incidentally, to secure buildings or stipends to its ministers. On the other hand, the civil magistrate is not at liberty to interfere in spiritual matters, in the government or services of the church. It is quite possible that the two should so far unite, each maintaining its own independence. But the tendency of the present day is rather to keep the two entirely separate, both favoring peace and high morality in a country.

SECT. XXVII. THE STATE.—The existence of government and of laws with power of execution is a necessity. Without these, and with every



man following the impulses of his nature, original and acquired, this world would be in a state of disquiet, disorder, and crime. If people have not a government ready-made for them, they must proceed to construct one.

In fact, government is of divine appointment, being of arrangements made by God. All the arrangements in our world seem to point to this, and to show that man must have some sort of national government. True, it is not determined either by the religion of nature or of the Bible what the nature of that government should be—a monarchy, an aristocracy, or a democracy, or a mixture of the three or of any two of them. This seems to be left to the judgment of mankind and the providential circumstances in which they are placed. But whatever be the form taken, it should always bear a reference to the divine authority. In this way a due place may be given both to the agency of God and the agency of man. But to the government, however formed, there must always be strict obedience rendered, it being always understood that the government keeps within its own province, having to do with men's lives and their property. Smuggling of every sort must



be regarded as unlawful and liable to be punished, as it is interfering with the nation's means of support. Everything should be provided which promotes peace and order, and everything which tends to war or discontent should be discountenanced and removed.

At times it may be important to have the legislature or the *very form of government* changed. It is not easy to state in definite terms when a subject may resist a government and seek to overturn it. It is time to inquire into the subject when any individual rights, civil or religious, are interfered with. When this is done in any form obedience is not required. In no case should a change of government, especially by violent means, be attempted, except when there is good reason to believe that the government that succeeds is better than that which has been displaced.

SECT. XXVIII. WAR.—We should never allow ourselves to look on war except with deep solemnity. In it thousands or tens of thousands of men are seeking to destroy each other. But there are cases in which war becomes necessary in stirring up a spirit of independence in oppo-

sition to oppression. It calls forth the highest feelings of bravery, and is the subject of the noblest songs which we sing. But in all cases one of the parties at least is in the wrong, and in most cases both parties are in the wrong, and are responsible for the blood that flows. In all cases before engaging in war we are to enquire calmly and resolutely whether the party we espouse is in the right. In these days disputes are settled more by arbitration, and it is to be hoped that the number of wars will be fewer.

SECT. XXIX. DUTIES TO OURSELVES.—People imagine that they can do what they please with themselves, can follow any whim or caprice, can gratify any taste or pursue any line of conduct. But it is not so—we are under law to God.

We are to attend to our bodies, we are to control and guide our eating and drinking, and to regulate the exercise which we take and the air which we breathe.

Self-cultivation is a special duty. So far as God allows, we are to improve every faculty which God has given. If there be any special gift which He has bestowed—say of philosophy,

or poetry, or science ; of business, or calculation, or discovery in travelling—we must reckon that as a call on the part of God specially to engage in it. Hugh Miller told me that if a man had great talents as a stone-mason, he should follow the trade. The gifts of genius are never to be neglected. When they are wanting, the want must be supplied by industry and application. Were these duties attended to, the world would advance steadily from age to age in all that is great and good.

The individual acts devolving on us are too many to be enumerated. But there is a general spirit to be cultivated which will issue in the acts. There is to be a love shown to all mankind in the various positions in which we may be placed. This is a duty which we owe to our fellow-men and to God, but which we also owe to ourselves, in order to secure the influence which we ought to exercise. There is to be an independence in forming our opinions, and courage in carrying them out. There is a virtue which we owe to God and our fellow-men and women, but which we owe specially to ourselves—it is that of chastity under every form.

Beginning in early life, we should seek to ac-

quire good and permanent habits, especially habits of self-command, habits of industry, habits of perseverance, habits of thorough integrity, habits of charity. As the result of these we will attain and maintain character. This will prevent us from vacillation or departing from the line we have chosen. It is for this purpose that the law of habit is given us, that it may keep us upright and stable. All this becoming known to our fellow-men, they will respect us and not suspect us of hypocrisy or deceit of any kind. Our character will come in the end to stand as a tower which no one has the courage to attack.

But in order to accomplish these ends it is not enough to proceed at random or by impulse ; this can never produce any lasting effect of a beneficent character. There must special attention be given to habits of temperance, meaning thereby not mere abstinence from intemperance or intoxicants, but in the government of our nature, of the tongue, and of all our lusts and passions. All these should be pressed upon us till they become parts of our being. When this is done in a community there is sure to be a general spirit of morality.

We are bound to take all steps to preserve our

own life as we do that of others. He who takes his own existence is doing what he has no authority to do. He is betraying a very precious and solemn trust which has been committed to him. He is, in fact, guilty of murder.

Nor let him say, as the suicide often does, that his vocation, that his usefulness is gone, and that there is no use in preserving what can only be an incumbrance. In fact, we are not in circumstances to say when our usefulness is gone. Though at present incapable of doing what we wish, the time may come when we can accomplish our ends, or more important ends than we contemplate.

It may be, one of the greatest ends which we can succeed in carrying out is to show how patiently, how magnanimously we can bear up under the depression and trials to which we are exposed. It is cowardly to flee when we should fight. The very highest purposes may be effected by our being subjected to annoyances and humiliations, in bearing up against which we may accomplish the very noblest ends.

In all cases it lies not with us, but with One who sees the end from the beginning, to determine how long we are to hold by our position,

which we are not to abandon till God dismisses us.

*The Consummation.*—We have shown that man is a moral agent, that he can discern between good and evil, and that he is responsible to God for his opinions and his acts. We carry this power with us wherever we go. As we do so it exalts us in the scale of beings. We have within us ideas and axioms which elevate us far above surroundings, above inanimate nature, and above the lower creatures that serve us.



